

### Where does sugar come from?

Sugar is found **naturally** in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, lentils and some dairy products.

Sugar is also added to foods such as soft drinks, fruit drinks, cereals, candy, baked goods, and desserts. This type of sugar is often called “**simple sugar**” or “**added sugar**”.

### How does our body use sugar?

All cells in our body, including cancer cells, use sugar for energy. Sugar in our body is called blood sugar or blood glucose. When we can eat normally, our body tightly controls blood sugar levels. This way all cells get a constant supply of energy.

If blood sugar levels are regularly low, our body is forced to make sugar to get energy. It does this by breaking down muscle and fat. If you lose weight from breaking down muscle and fat, you may have less strength and energy, and lower immunity (ability to fight infections such as the flu). Losing too much weight during cancer treatment can delay treatment and slow recovery.

### Is there a link between sugar and cancer?

It sounds like a simple question, but the answer is not so simple. Research does show an indirect link that eating too much sugar over time can lead to more body fat. Research shows that too much body fat can increase your risk for many types of cancer.

Cells that grow very fast, like cancer cells, use more blood sugar for energy. However, eating more sugar does not mean the cancer cells will grow faster. Nor does eating less sugar slow cancer growth or prevent cancer.

### Should we avoid all sugar in our diet?

It is best to eat plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans and lentils. Although these foods have natural sugars, they also have cancer fighting substances such as vitamins and minerals.

It is best to limit the amount of “**added sugar**” in your diet. High amounts of these sugars can lead to poor blood sugar control, weight gain, and poor nutrition.

### How can we limit “added sugar” in our diet?

#### Read food labels to identify “added sugar”

Look for these words: sugar, brown sugar, icing sugar, liquid sugar, cane or beet sugar, high fructose corn syrup, molasses, agave syrup, honey, maple syrup, maltodextrin, malt syrup, demerara, fruit juice concentrates and syrup.

Other names for sugar are words that end in 'ose' – sucrose, fructose, glucose, glucose-fructose, maltose, dextrose, and galactose.

If these words are at the start of the ingredient list, it means they are one of the main ingredients in the food.

### **Limit beverages with large amounts of “added sugar”**

Examples are soft drinks, sweetened coffee and tea drinks, and sugary energy drinks. Choose drinks that have no “**added sugar**” when possible. Unsweetened coffee, tea, plain water and milk are good choices. If you need extra calories, choose a high calorie drink that includes whole fruit, protein and fibre. For example, a homemade smoothie.

### **Limit processed foods**

"Processed foods" include those that have been cooked, canned, frozen or packaged. Processed foods may have also been changed by preserving, preparing in different ways or fortifying (adding things like vitamins). These foods are often higher in “**added sugar**” and can take the place of healthier food choices.

### **Enjoy desserts on special occasions and have smaller portions.**

If you want something sweet, naturally sweet whole fruit is a good every day choice.

For more information on sugar and cancer, check out the American Institute of Cancer Research:

[www.aicr.org/news/the-sugar-cancer-connection](http://www.aicr.org/news/the-sugar-cancer-connection)

You can also visit our Nutrition Services page: [www.bccancer.bc.ca/nutrition](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/nutrition)