

Smiles Better!



Hidden sugars exposed

Causeway Dental's Dr Nuala Devlin warns about the dangers of hidden sugar in our food

Sugar has already been the hot topic of 2014. We are hearing from many dieticians, doctors and health organisations about the negative and quite shocking facts about the effects of sugar on our body.

It is commonly known that sugar is the main cause of tooth decay and we ask our patients to cut out common things that we know contain high sugar, eg fizzy drinks, sweets, chocolate and biscuits. Excessive sugar consumption is not only a cause of tooth decay – it can also lead to plaque which harbours the bacteria that cause gum disease.

But people who think they are eating sensibly by cutting out sugar may be in for a nasty surprise.

I've been reading Sarah Wilson's new book: 'I quit sugar' and have had my eyes opened. I thought I ate a pretty good diet and although I'd have a treat now and then which I knew contained sugar, I thought the rest of my diet was pretty low in sugar. What I have found alarming as a dentist is how much of our food contains hidden sugars, things which you would never imagine to contain it such as curry sauces, tomato based sauces, actually nearly everything that is processed and in a jar or tin. It's easy to fall into the trap of when something says 'no added sugar' or 'natural sugars', but if you look at the label, it still contains a lot of sugar. Many supposedly 'healthy' foods in reality also contain hidden sugars.

For me I have always stayed away from 'diet' or 'low fat' meal as they are laced with so much sugar. Muller light is the perfect example, on certain diets this is class as a 'free food' but what nutritional value does it have when it you are just eating spoonfuls of sugar?

Breakfast cereals are another thing I stay clear of. It's alarming

the amount of sugar in these, even the 'healthy' ones such as Cheerios with their 'wholesome goodness'. The ingredients list has corn starch (another type of sugar) as the second ingredient and sugar as the third ingredient. Yet if you ask any child what they eat for breakfast it is normally cereal.

I have now changed the way I shop, the reason being is that I now try and cook everything from scratch, and anything I do buy I look at the label, as a general rule if sugar is in the top five list of ingredients I don't buy it. I'm not asking you to all do this, but what I would recommend is that you have a look at labels, you will be surprised.

For example meals such as Tesco's crispy beef with sweet chilli and Asda's sticky chilli chicken were found to have more sugar content than vanilla ice cream. The labelling used by manufactures can also be confusing as sugar can be classed as dextrose, fructose, glucose and sucrose. Sugar can either be present in food naturally such as fruit, dried fruit and honey or added as a sweetener or preservative as in most processed foods.

The Food Standards Agency classifies a product as having a high sugar content if it has more than 15g of sugar per 100g or more than 18g if the portion is more than 100g.

Asda sticky chilli chicken contained 19.2g of sugar per 100g and Tesco's crispy beef with sweet chilli sauce had 23.1g per 100g. Weight Watchers oat digestive biscuits contain 20.5g of sugar per 100g - almost 4% more than McVitie's digestives. Vanilla ice cream contains 17.9g per 100g

Cutting out sugar completely is difficult and it really means making a lifestyle change, but if we each just made a small change in our shopping pattern and read a few more labels hopefully we can keep an eye on the amount of sugar we consume.