Dear Alice,

I have heard that some sugars, such as those in honey, are more healthful than others. What sugars are in honey? What are the other kinds of sugar? Can any "unmediated" pure sugar be healthful?

Thanks!

Sweet tooth

**Answer**

Dear Sweet tooth,

Honey actually contains the same basic sugar units as table sugar. Both contain glucose and fructose. Granulated table sugar, or sucrose, has glucose and fructose hooked together, whereas in honey, fructose and glucose remain in individual units. Fructose is sweeter than glucose, which is one of the reasons fructose is used in so many food products today. However, fructose does not convert to energy as efficiently as glucose. As a result, processed foods containing granulated sugar high in fructose convert to fat stores more easily than honey.

Caloric content of honey differs from that of table sugar. One teaspoon of table sugar contains 16 calories, while one teaspoon of honey has 22 calories. While honey may have more calories, people may actually use less of it, since it is both sweeter and denser than table sugar. This being said, you actually may take in about the same amount of calories that you would with sugar or perhaps even less.

Some nutrition experts say honey, unlike table sugar, contains small amounts of vitamins and minerals and that honey can aid in digestion. Researchers are currently looking into antioxidant levels of honey to see if they also can improve one's health.

In addition, pure sucrose, or table sugar, is highly processed, while honey has only one processing step. (The honey is heated to prevent crystallization and yeast fermentation from happening during storage.) This has implications on the environment and on people who believe that minimally processed foods are healthier. Vegans, who don't use animal products, do not include honey in their eating plans because it is produced by bees.

As far as "unmediated pure sugar," usually called unrefined sugar, goes, most researchers believe it to be a tad healthier than the processed form. The refining process, which is used to
get us our good-ol' table sugar, removes all naturally occurring trace minerals from the sugar plant, leaving us with "empty calories." Moreover, unlike refined sugar, unrefined sugar has more fiber in it, which provides an added health bonus. Unrefined sugar’s calories are identical to that of table sugar (16 calories/teaspoon).

A more general discussion of sugar can be found in the answer to [Sugar and its effects][2].

Alice!
Category:
Food for Thought

Related questions


Published date:
May 18, 1995
Last reviewed on:
Feb 02, 2005

---

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/honey-vs-sugar-%E2%80%93-which-healthier#comment-0