



Men'sHealth

30-DAY EAT LESS SUGAR CHALLENGE

Our painless plan for dropping the sweet stuff.

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FOR YEARS, the biggest problem with sugar was empty calories. Or so we thought. That's just the tip of the iceberg, according to the latest research. Too much, it turns out, can give your body serious trouble and lead to diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension, and inflammation, not to mention belly fat.

Sure, nixing the ice cream, donuts, and chocolate is a great start. But to really get the sweet stuff out of your diet, you may need to kick things up a notch. That's because sugar is in everything from gummy vitamins to balsamic vinegar. So even though health experts recommend capping added sugars at 10 percent of calories, most men eat more like 13 percent (that's about 17 teaspoons, or 71 grams). That's about how much is in a medium-sized brownie. Aim for closer to 9 teaspoons—aka 36 grams, or 150 calories—from added sugar.

To cut back on sugar without missing it, use this 30-day plan. Every week, you'll focus on one spot that tons of added sugar tends to live in a guy's life.

- Each day during the workweek, you'll make one small change that makes a big difference in your daily totals.
- On the weekends, you get two days to keep all those changes going before stepping into the next week's challenge.

By the end of the month, you'll have your sugar targets where your body and health want them. Here's exactly what to do.



WEEK 1

Pour Yourself Better Drinks

Sugary drinks account for a quarter of the added sugar most guys consume. So, drinking less sugar is your first mission, since it can make a big difference in your daily totals very quickly.

Day 1 Cut soda in half.

With 37 grams of sugar per can (49 in a single-serve bottle), soda is the number one source of sugar in America. Start small: Cut back on the number of sodas you have a day by half. Then, try changing the soda—make your own with seltzer and fruit juice or flavored syrup and maybe even some plants like mint. Gradually cut back the amount of juice or syrup until there's little or none.

Day 2 Reach for the original energy drink.

A can of Red Bull might seem like a great way to kick yourself into gear. But with as much sugar as soda, not so much. Drink coffee instead. Adding milk is fine; put a dash of cinnamon on top instead of using sugar to take off the bitter edge. Tea works, too.

Day 3 Switch your milk.

Alterna-milks can be packed with sugar or great choices. Check yours. Oatmilk, for instance, even if it's unsweetened, can contain at least 7 grams of sugar per cup. Switch to unsweetened almond milk (2 grams per cup). Or upgrade to unsweetened soymilk. You'll score 7 grams of protein, yet only 1 gram of sugar.

Day 4 Grab better 'booch.

The typical 16-ounce bottle of kombucha packs 22 grams of sugar, so don't just grab any old brand off the shelf. Look for sugar-free varieties (ones that use monkfruit as a sweetener are ok).

Day 5 Skip the sports drink.

Unless you're working out for an hour or longer, water will do you just fine; you don't need the sugar to maintain your energy stores. Savings: 20 grams per 12-ounce bottle (33, if you usually chug 20 ounces).

WEEK 2

Get Hidden Sugar **Out of Your Snacks**

Even if you prefer savory snacks, there's likely sugar hiding in your favorite munchies. Your challenge is to find it and replace it with lighter alternatives.

Day 1 Elevate your jerky.

This portable meat may get a thumbs up for protein. But sugar? Not so much. Some brands clock in at 9 grams per serving. Luckily, zero sugar jerkies are now a thing, so dig in.

Day 2 Munch on seed crackers.

Sometimes, healthy-sounding foods aren't. Like whole-grain crackers that pack 4 grams of sugar per handful. Get your crunch fix from seed-based crackers, which might be made of pumpkin, flax, sesame or chia seeds. If you can't find those, at least look for a whole-grain cracker that has less than 1 gram of added sugar.

Day 3 Toss berries into plain Greek yogurt.

If you're going keto or are really want to challenge yourself to eat as little sugar as possible, make berries your fruit of choice. With about 7 grams of sugar per cup, they're the lowest sugar fruits out there. (An orange has about 17 grams per cup.)

Day 4 Pick a chip with a short ingredient list.

You wouldn't think potato chips had added sugar. But lots do, particularly if they're swimming in BBQ seasoning. There are plenty of options made with just 3 ingredients: Spuds, oil, and salt. Grab one of those.

Day 5 Make sure your protein bar isn't a cookie.

Some bars come with a hefty side of sugar, as in 29 grams' worth, especially if they're covered in chocolate. Grab a keto protein bar instead. They're low-sugar by design.

WEEK 3

Get Sugar **Out of Your Breakfast**

Whether breakfast is the most important meal of the day or not, it's certainly the one with the most gratuitous sugar. This week, focus on lower-sugar trades.

Day 1 Think nooks and crannies.

Bread tastes savory, but it often requires some sugar for texture and browning. Take bagels, for instance. A seemingly healthy yet dense, whole-wheat bagel harbors 8 grams. Toast up a light, airy whole-wheat English muffin and whittle that down to 1 innocent gram.

Day 2 Ditch the raisin bran.

Between the dried fruit and the added sugars, each cup of a cereal like Raisin Bran gives you 17 sugar grams. Trade up to a cereal like original Cheerios with a respectable single gram of sugar. Then top them with ½ cup of sliced strawberries (4 grams).

Day 3 Put down the ham, egg, and cheese sandwich.

Cured meats are not your friend—sugar is used in the curing process. (And all that refined bread doesn't help your health, either.) Instead of inhaling the sandwich's 9 grams of sugar, order an egg and cheese wrap. With less bread and a single slice of bacon, you're looking at only 1 gram of sugar.

Day 4 Swap in tahini for peanut butter on toast.

Zero sugar, same nutty flavor. Savings: 3 grams. Or choose a peanut butter with no added sugar. But try the more creative solution, first.

Day 5 Spice oatmeal with cinnamon.

Or use pumpkin pie spice. They're naturally sweet-tasting, minus the sugar of honey, maple syrup, or agave.

WEEK 4

Get the Sugar Out of **Lunch and Dinner**

Lunch and dinner may not scream sugar, but it's in there. Your mission: Keep the flavor, lose the excess sugar.

Day 1 Steer clear of gluten-free frozen foods.

(Unless, of course, you have celiac disease or gluten sensitivity). When food companies remove gluten, taste and texture usually go out the window too. Which is why extra sugar and salt are often added to pump up the flavor.

Day 2 Try an open-faced sandwich.

Sandwiches make up 7 percent of the typical guy's added sugar. Lose a slice of bread and knock off 2 grams. Pack some sunflower seeds and vegetables on there and you won't miss the bread.

Day 3 Trade ketchup and BBQ sauce for mustard on your burger or dog.

Save 4 to 5 sugar grams. Go far beyond boring with options like salsa verde, pumpkin seeds, cilantro and cumin; mayo, tomato pesto, and lemon zest; or even guac with pineapple, red onion and cayenne.

Day 4 Buy naked veggies.

Canned creamed corn: 16 grams. Frozen buffalo cauliflower: 4 grams. Mixed frozen vegetables with teriyaki sauce: 8 grams. When convenience is of the essence, go for canned or frozen veg sans sauce, or make your own marinara.

Day 5 Pick up a pizza.

Ditch the frozen dinner. Whether it's fajita chicken, stuffing baked turkey patties, or country fried steak, you're looking at 20 grams of sugar. Shop around for options: Some cauliflower pizzas have just 4 grams of sugar in a half pie.