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## Sweet Surrender: Sugar Curbs Urged

By **RON WINSLOW** and **SHIRLEY S. WANG**

The American Heart Association is taking aim at the nation's sweet tooth, urging consumers to significantly cut back on the amount of sugar they get from such foods as soft drinks, cookies and ice cream.

In a scientific statement issued Monday, the organization says most women should limit their sugar intake to 100 calories, or about six teaspoons, a day; for men, the recommendation is 150 calories, or nine teaspoons.

The recommendations are likely to prove challenging for many consumers to meet. Just one 12-ounce can of cola has about 130 calories, or eight teaspoons of sugar.

Data gathered during a national nutrition survey between 2001 and 2004 suggest that Americans consume on average 355 calories, or more than 22 teaspoons, of sugar a day.

"We're trying to make reasonable recommendations around the amount of sugar in a diet that enables people to achieve or maintain a healthy weight," said Rachel Johnson, associate provost and professor of nutrition at the University of Vermont in Burlington and lead author of the statement.

As the heart association's statement acknowledges, the science directly linking added sugar consumption to obesity is inconsistent. This in part reflects, the impact of such things as genetics, physical activity and diet have on weight.

The heart association has encouraged consumers to moderate sugar consumption, but the new statement is the first time it has suggested specific limits. The recommendations apply only to what are known as added sugars—those that are added to foods during manufacturing, or by consumers. They don't include sugar that occurs naturally in fruits, vegetables, dairy products and other foods.

### Biggest Culprits

Food groups that contribute the largest portions of added sugars to the American diet, as a percentage of total added sugars consumed. These are defined as sugars and syrups added to foods during processing or preparation, or at the table.

Regular soft drinks

22.0%

Marion Nestle, a professor of nutrition and food studies at New York University who wasn't involved with the document, said it was a significant departure from previous recommendations, in part because

regular soft drinks	22.0
Sugars and candy	16.1
Cakes, cookies, pies	12.9
Fruit drinks (fruitades and fruit punch)	9.7
Dairy desserts and milk products (ice cream, sweetened yogurt, and sweetened milk)	8.6
Other grains (cinnamon toast and honey-nut waffles)	5.8

Source: American Heart Association

"nobody has ever said it quite so forcefully."

The statement heightens the battle against foods that many public-health officials say contribute to the higher risk of such problems as diabetes and cardiovascular disease among the nation's overweight and obese consumers. A recent unrelated

study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the medical costs associated with treating obesity-related conditions may have reached \$147 billion last year, up from \$74 billion a decade ago.

### *Major Sources*

The chief sources of added sugar in the diet include soft drinks, candy, desserts such as cakes and cookies, fruit drinks and sweetened dairy products, including ice cream and yogurt, the statement says. Sugar in alcoholic beverages also counts as added sugar, Dr. Johnson said.

Added sugars "offer no nutritional value other than calories to the diet," Dr. Johnson said. "The majority of Americans could reduce their risk of heart disease by achieving healthy weight and the evidence is fairly clear that reducing the amount of sugars can help with that."

While many studies associate increased consumption of soft drinks with higher calorie intake, weight gain and obesity, others have failed to support the connection. Similarly, research investigating added sugar's impact on blood pressure, heightened inflammation and on changes in blood fats called triglycerides is inconclusive. And there are no studies linking the recommended limits to preventing weight gain or promoting weight loss.

Instead, Dr. Johnson and her colleagues on the heart association's nutrition committee based the suggestions on the concept of discretionary calories that are part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's dietary guidelines called Mypyramid. Discretionary calories are those allotted to a person beyond what are necessary to consume nutrients essential to a healthy diet while still maintaining a proper weight.

Under the Mypyramid guidelines, people on a 2,000-calorie-per-day diet have 267 discretionary calories. Active young people on a 3,000-calorie-a-day-diet have 512 discretionary calories.

Dr. Johnson said the committee decided that allocating half of the discretionary calories for added sugar was a proper course. More than that risks displacing necessary nutrients with calories from added sugar, she said.

For a moderately active middle-aged woman on a 1,800-calorie-a-day diet, the recommendations translate to about 100 calories for added sugar. For a sedentary middle-aged man consuming 2,200 calories a day, the allotment is about 150 calories.

Dr. Johnson said the statement doesn't tell people to eliminate sugar from their diets. She does recommend using the allotment to make healthier foods more tasty, such as adding sugar to whole-grain cereal, instead of using it on candy. People who get regular exercise, she said, can consume higher quantities of added sugar.

William Dietz, director of the division of nutrition, physical activity and obesity at the CDC, said the guidelines are reasonable, but he said it may be difficult for the public to understand the recommendation in terms of grams of sugar intake.

### *'Sugar Burden'*

Instead, "I think it's easier to talk to people about what types of foods are likely to contribute to the sugar burden," with sugar-sweetened beverages like soft drinks and fruit juices at the top of the list, he said.

Consuming added sugar in drinks is particularly problematic, he said, because it doesn't make you feel as full as when you eat solid food.

Quillian Haralson, 38, of Waldorf, Md., says he would try to adhere to the recommendations and pay special attention to the sugar intake of his two children.

But, he said, it would be challenging to figure out how much added sugar is in different foods.

Mr. Haralson, a high-school teacher, said he is attentive to his three-year-old son's sugar intake, for instance, but he said he couldn't estimate how much the child is currently consuming.

"That's the sad part; I can't tell you," he said.

Current food labels don't list sugar content in calories or teaspoons and don't distinguish between natural and added sugars, Dr. Johnson said.

—Valerie Bauerlein contributed to this article.

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