

Sugar's new labeling isn't enough

When it comes to your health, you have to take charge. *by Dr. Susan Maples*

Recently the FDA finalized the new Nutrition Facts label for packaged foods to reflect what scientists now know about sugar, including the link between sugar and chronic diseases such as obesity and heart disease as well as higher rates of tooth decay.

The FDA drew the danger line at 10 percent of our daily calorie intake in added sugar. Based on a 2,000 calories a day diet, that recommendation comes to 50 grams or 12.5 teaspoons a day.

The sugar industry and food manufacturers are freaking about the new labels but perhaps they should be celebrating, considering this is twice what the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended in 2014. (5 percent of our intake—100 calories, 25g or 6 teaspoons).

That's the same recommendation from the American Heart Association (AHA) who is concerned that one in three US adults are dying from heart

disease. To follow this recommendation most people have to reduce their sugar by a whopping 75 percent.

So it seems the FDA wimped out—but who's surprised, with big food beverage corporations on their back? Another battle was lost when the FDA decided to represent the added sugars in grams rather than teaspoons. Many public health advocates were pushing for teaspoons, which is easier for people to understand and visualize.

Of course, much of the sugars we consume are hidden in processed foods that are not seen as sweets. For example, one tablespoon of ketchup contains around four grams, or one teaspoon, of sugar.

If you'd rather follow the WHO and AHA recommendations, just double the percent daily limit represented on the new labels. Aim for 100 calories a day, or 25 grams/6 teaspoons. That's impossible if you stay hooked on sugary beverages because one 12-oz soda is 38 grams/9 teaspoons of sugar—more than your

allotment for the entire day!

Will this labeling help? Some experts say no. "It's a useful tool for those who are really educated and concerned, and has zero effect on the population most at need," said Barry Popkin, a professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Many public health advocates think the groups most at risk for obesity and diet-related illness may not change habits without more severe measures to discourage sugar consumption, such as taxes on sugar and food warning labels.

The bottom line? Unfortunately, we cannot completely trust the FDA when it comes to our health right now. Take charge of your own health and make changes today.



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