Sugar
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

If you’re like many people, you may be consuming more sugar than you are aware of, that’s because sugar is added to so many foods and beverages. Added equals added calories.

All sugar, whether natural or processed, is a type of simple carbohydrate that your body used for energy. Fruits, vegetables and dairy foods all naturally contain sugar.

“Added sugar” refers to sugar used as an ingredient in processed foods, such as breads, cakes, soft drinks, jams and ice cream, and sugar eaten separately or added to foods at the table. Examples include white sugar, brown sugar, raw sugar, corn syrup, corn syrup solids, high fructose corn syrup, malt syrup, maple syrup, pancake syrup, fructose sweetener, liquid fructose, honey, molasses, anhydrous dextrose, crystal dextrose and dextrin. Desserts, sodas, and sports drinks are the top source of added sugar for most Americans.

The ugly truth is that added sugar means empty calories (no nutrients beyond calories) that put kids and adults at risk of obesity and health problems that can show up as early as adolescence.

Somewhat surprisingly, more calories from added sugar come from foods than from beverages. And more added sugars are consumed at home than at school, out of vending machines or at restaurants.

So what can parents and caregivers do to take the sugar out of their kitchens?

- **Desserts and sweets.** Limit portions of cookies, candies and other baked goods. Instead try fruit-based desserts.

- **Cereals.** Limit sugary cereals. Look for whole-grain cereals, such as oatmeal, that don't have added sugar — or salt. Add nuts, fruit or cinnamon if you want to jazz it up.

- **Yogurts.** An 8-ounce serving has about 12 grams of natural sugar. This is included in the total sugar listed on the Nutrition Facts Label. Many flavored yogurts also have a significant amount of added sugar. Avoid those and instead opt for plain yogurt and add your own sweetness by blending in frozen berries or other fruits.

- **Beverages.** Stick to water and unflavored milk (most of the time). Limit juices, sports drinks and other flavored beverages.

Bottom line: Check the ingredient list on anything that comes in a package. Ingredients are listed by decreasing weight. If you see sugar by any name near the top of list, reconsider. Is there a better option? Could you make this item yourself and eliminate or reduce the amount of sugar?

Does any of this surprise you? Are you ready to dive into your cupboards and see what you might change?