



# NUTRITION TIPS

## Sugar and Children's Diet

Sugar is the sweet crystalline substance obtained mainly from sugarcane. It is used in many foods, drinks and medicines to improve their taste. Sugar is also readily found in fruits, milk, sugar beets, sweet potatoes and carrots.

Most children enjoy eating sugar because of its sweet taste. Sugar, apart from being sweet, is a carbohydrate and is thus an important source of energy in children's bodies.

The simplest sugars around are glucose, galactose and fructose. Milk contains glucose and galactose (lactose), while fruits and sugarcane contain glucose and fructose (sucrose). Other forms of sugar are honey, brown sugar and corn syrup.

Apart from being a food sweetener, sugar is also important for baking bread and in confectionery. A moderate intake of refined

sugar is really a part of a healthy diet for children and adding a little of it to nutritious grain foods like cereals, cornflakes and pap can encourage them eat more of these foods.

## Sugar Metabolism in Children

Sugars are an important source of energy for children's bodies. During digestion, carbohydrates like starch and sugars are broken down to ultimately yield glucose. The glucose is then absorbed from the small intestine into the bloodstream from where it is transported around the body for use or is stored in the liver and muscles for future use.

Glucose is a very important substance in children's bodies because it is the only nutrient used by the brain and red blood cells for energy. To prevent its short supply, the pancreas secretes insulin to regulate its use.

## Sugar Consumption and Children's Health

Sugar forms a large part of children's diet. It is found in drinks, cereals, biscuits and chocolate. The problem with sugar however is that it can do the body more harm than good when consumed in excess. Excess sugar intake suppresses the immune system and weakens children's defenses against infectious diseases. It can also cause the deficiency of minerals like chromium and copper. Excess sugar intake can also lead to a rapid rise in adrenaline level, a situation that results in hyperactivity, anxiety and reduced learning capacity in children. It also causes tooth decay, gum disease, pile, haemorrhoids, diabetes and obesity.

Thus, while sugar supplies children's bodies with quick calories, its over-consumption can be dangerous. So, you should help your children regulate their sugar intake.



### \* For more information on child nutrition

Visit the Olu Akinkugbe Foundation  
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