

## YOU LIFESTYLE | ADVICE

### LEARN LABEL LINGO

"The ingredients are listed in descending order according to weight. So the main ingredient is listed first," Galvão says.

Avoid if the first ingredient is sugar (it could be called sucrose, dextrose, maltose, corn syrup or barley malt, among others).

"The sugar content of breakfast cereals for children is shocking," says Hamish van Wyk, dietician and diabetes educator at the Centre for Diabetes and Endocrinology in Johannesburg. Opt for wholegrains with no added sugars such as oats and bran.

### OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

■ A sugar-free label means one serving contains less than 0,5g of sugar. "When you're

choosing between standard products and their sugar-free counterparts, compare the food labels. If the sugar-free product has fewer carbohydrates, it might be the better choice," Galvão says.

■ A "no sugar added" label means no sugar was added during processing or packaging. But foods with this label may still be high in sugar, so check the total per 100g.

"Labels state 'carbohydrates of which total sugars' - that's what you want to look at," Van Wyk says. "As a guideline, low sugar is less than 5g per 100g, moderate is 5-22,5g per 100g and high is more than 22,5g per 100g.

"As for drinks, low sugar is less than 2,5g per 100ml, moderate is 2,5-11,25g per 100ml and high is more than 11,25g per 100ml."

### IF YOU DO ONLY THREE THINGS ...

**We asked our experts for their top three tips.**

**1** Cut out sweetened fizzy drinks, ice tea and flavoured water - these are sugar traps.

**2** Eat less - or cut out - chocolates and sweets.

**3** Check labels, and limit foods with more than 5g of sugar per 100g.

### SWEETENING THE DEAL

What's the best alternative if you want some sweetness? There are two categories to choose from: nutritive sweeteners (which contain kilojoules) and non-nutritive sweeteners (kilojoule-free).

While things such as honey and maple syrup are considered more natural, they aren't necessarily healthier, says Hamish van Wyk, registered dietician and diabetes educator at the Centre for Diabetes and Endocrinology in Johannesburg. "Sugars are sugars."

"Sugar alcohols such as xylitol, mannitol, sorbitol and isomalt are slightly lower in kilojoules," De Araujo says. "But it's minimal, so this isn't very helpful when it comes to weight loss and disease prevention. One teaspoon of xylitol contains 65kJ whereas one teaspoon of sugar contains 80kJ."

Non-nutritive sweeteners (artificial sweeteners) such as stevia, saccharin, aspartame and sucralose are helpful in weight loss and weight maintenance as they contain no carbohydrates or kilojoules, De Araujo says.

#### Nutritive sweeteners

**Sugar alcohols** are a type of carbohydrate used as sugar substitutes. Technically, they aren't really sugars - which is why foods containing them are often labelled "sugar-free". But they do contain kilojoules, which is why you can't eat unlimited quantities. Here are the better-known kinds.

- **Sorbitol** - 60% of the sweetness of sucrose (cane sugar)
- **Xylitol** - 100% as sweet as sucrose
- **Isomalt** - 60% as sweet as sucrose
- **Mannitol** - 70% as sweet as sucrose
- **Hydrogenated starch hydrolysates (HSH)** - from 40% to 90% as sweet as sucrose

#### Non-nutritive sweeteners

**Also called artificial sweeteners**, these contain no kilojoules and are much sweeter than sucrose, so only small amounts are needed. They're generally considered safe, although high intakes of some have been tentatively linked to an increased risk of certain cancers.

- **Saccharin** - around 300 times as sweet as sucrose. Scientists say up to 1g a day poses no health risks to adults.
- **Stevia** - 300 times as sweet as sucrose
- **Acesulfame-K** - 200 times as sweet as sucrose
- **Aspartame** - 200 times sweeter than sucrose. It's not stable in heat or for long periods in liquid form, so isn't used in cooking.
- **Sucralose** - 600 times sweeter than sugar. It's heat-stable and often used in baked goods.
- **Cyclamate** - 30 times sweeter than sucrose. It's currently banned in the USA because of studies linking it to an increased. ■

