

JOEL FUHRMAN, MD

Are all sugar alternatives healthful?

Added sugars come in several forms other than sugar, evaporated cane juice and high fructose corn syrup.

Calorie-containing sweeteners such as maple syrup, honey, agave and coconut sugar are marketed as "natural" and often touted as healthier alternatives to

regular sugar. Is there any truth to these claims?

Similar to sugar, these are low-nutrient concentrated sweeteners; they add substantial calories to the diet while contributing very little nutritional value. Maple syrup and honey elevate blood glucose similarly to sugar

(sucrose), leading to disease-causing effects in the body.

Agave and coconut sugar rank lower on the glycemic index, but are still empty calories and may have other negative effects. Repeated exposure to these excessively sweet tastes dulls the taste buds to the naturally sweet tastes of berries and other fresh fruits, which perpetuates cravings for sweets and can undermine weight loss.

Since some natural sweeteners undergo fewer processing steps than sugar, they may retain some phytochemicals from the plants they originate from, but their nutrient-to-calorie ratio is still very low, and they contain minimal or no fiber to slow the absorption of their sugars.

The negative health effects of added sugar and high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) are well-documented, including increased risk of weight gain, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancers.

Agave nectar is marketed as a low-glycemic sweetener, due to its high fructose content (agave is approximately 90 percent fructose). Sucrose is half fructose and half glucose, made up of one fructose molecule linked to one glucose molecule. HFCS contains 55 percent fructose and 42 percent glucose.

All sweeteners (and fruits)

contain some combination of glucose, fructose, and the two bound together as sucrose.

Maple syrup contains about 90 percent sucrose, so it is very similar to regular white sugar. Coconut sugar contains 70 to 80 percent sucrose, and honey contains 49 percent fructose and 43 percent glucose.

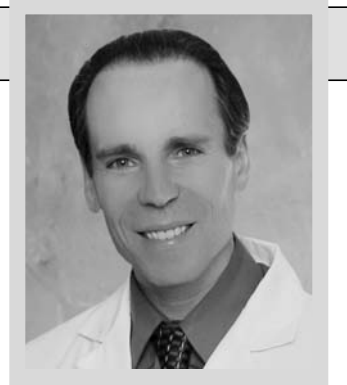
Fructose and glucose are broken down differently by the body. When fructose is absorbed, it is transported directly to the liver, where it is broken down to produce energy. Fructose itself does not stimulate insulin secretion by the pancreas.

However, much of the fructose is actually metabolized and converted into glucose in the liver, so it does raise blood glucose somewhat (although not as much as sucrose or glucose).

Despite its low glycemic index, added fructose in the form of sweeteners still poses health risks. Fructose stimulates fat production by the liver, which causes elevated blood triglycerides, a predictor of heart disease.

Elevated triglycerides have been reported in human studies after consuming fructose-sweetened drinks, and this effect was heightened in the participants who were insulin-resistant.

Fructose, when used as a



sweetener, also seems to have effects on hunger and satiety hormones that may lead to increased calorie intake in subsequent meals.

When you ingest any caloric sweetener, you get a mix of disease-promoting effects: the glucose-elevating effects of added glucose and the triglyceride-raising effects of added fructose.

Sweeteners, unlike whole fruits, are concentrated sugars without the necessary fiber to regulate the entry of glucose into the bloodstream and fructose to the liver.

All caloric sweeteners have effects that promote weight gain, diabetes and heart disease, regardless of their ratio of glucose to fructose, or what type of plant they originate from.

Dr. Fuhrman is a New York Times best-selling author and board-certified family physician. Visit his website DrFuhrman.com, or submit questions and comments to newsquestions@drfuhrman.com.

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IN BRIEF

Dems meet today

Florence Area Democratic Club will meet today, Jan. 3, at

11 a.m., in the Siuslaw Public Library's Conference Room.

Guest will be Jessica Lloyd-

Rogers of KXCR Community Radio. The meeting is open to the public.

SSWCD meeting set for Monday

The Siuslaw Soil and Water Conservation District will hold its regularly scheduled board meeting Monday, Jan. 5, at the new district office, 1775 Laurel Place, Suite No. 4, in Florence.

The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. For more information, call the district office at 541-997-1272.

Port sets special meeting for Thursday

The Port of Siuslaw Board of Commissioners will hold a special meeting on Thursday, Jan. 8, at 9 a.m., at the port office, 100 Harbor St.

This meeting is a work session to review and discuss the 2013-18 Strategic Business Plan. Port meetings are open to the public. For more information, call 541-997-3426.

Women veterans to meet Friday

The January 2015 Coastal Women Veterans will have its monthly luncheon at the Surfside Restaurant at Driftwood Shores, 88416 First Ave., on Friday, Jan. 9, at 11:30 a.m. All military veterans are invited to attend.

RSVP to Terri Pennington at 541-999-2400, or email Terri32dunes@oregonfast.net.

Food co-op hosts recycling Jan. 9-16

Recycle almost anything that plugs in or runs on batteries at the Real Food Co-op between Friday, Jan. 9, and Friday, Jan. 16. NextStep Recycling in Eugene will place a large box outside of the co-op at 1379B Rhododendron Drive for anyone to leave donations of unwanted electronics.

Visit nextsteprecycling.org for a complete list of items that can be donated. For more information, call Real Food Co-op at 541-997-3396.

PFLAG to discuss 'Hot Topics' Jan. 13

PFLAG Florence presents "Hot Topics" on Tuesday, Jan. 13, at the Fellowship Hall of Florence United Methodist Church, 333 Kingwood Ave.

The meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. The public is invited and refreshments will be served.

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Saturday, Jan. 17



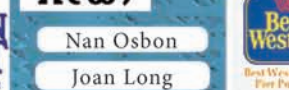
Tom Paxton
Saturday, 7:30 PM

Artisan Fair
Saturday, 10 - 5:30 & Sunday, 10 - 3:30

Annual Pie Baking Contest - Sat. 1:00
& Pie Sale - Saturday 1:30

Tickets on Sale at 541-997-1994
or on-line www.eventcenter.org

OUR UNDERWRITERS:



The Winter Folk Festival is a project of the Friends of the Florence Events Center, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to supporting the FEC and the Florence community. These activities and Kids Concerts are supported, in part, with funds provided by the Mapleton Community Foundation, Streets Insurance Agency, Frank & Florence Williams, and Ladies of the Elks.

