

Not so sweet: Canadians worried about sugar but lack practical knowledge to reduce health risks

As the research linking the consumption of too much sugar to severe health risks piles up, it should come as no surprise that a clear majority of Canadian women say sugar is an important consideration when choosing snacks for themselves and their children, according to a new poll by Leger and KIND® Snacks. But while Canadians are worried about getting too much sugar, the poll also identified significant gaps in Canadians' level of sugar-savviness – which could prevent them from making the healthiest choices for themselves and their families.

In a survey of 992 Canadian women conducted online between March 27 and April 1, 2017, 77 per cent said the amount of sugar was a “very” or “somewhat” important factor in choosing snacks for themselves and 89 per cent rated sugar as important in choosing snacks for their children. The recognition of the importance of considering and limiting total sugar content is good news: among the research, an accumulating number of studies have linked an excess of dietary sugar to heart disease, stroke, obesity, diabetes, high blood cholesterol, and cancer. Less good? Canadians are in the dark about how to apply this information, lacking knowledge about how much sugar is an appropriate amount in either a single snack or in their overall diet, which foods are responsible for the majority of sugar consumption, and even of the recommended upper limits for total sugar consumption.

The Leger/KIND® Snacks survey revealed the following:

- **While Canadians estimated that 34 per cent of their total sugar consumption comes from fruits and vegetables, they reported that sugars from “other” foods/beverages – things like snack foods and sweetened drinks – amounts to just 20 per cent of total consumption.** In fact, Statistics Canada reports that sugars from “other” foods make up the lion’s share of total sugar consumption at 35 per cent.
- **Canadians need more help decoding how much sugar is in packaged foods.** While 45 per cent of women polled said the first thing they look for to determine sugar content is the Nutrition Facts table and another 30 per cent said they look at ingredient lists, nearly half of those polled (42 per cent) reported that they also consider claims such as “sugar reduced.” Seven per cent of those polled said they didn’t know how to assess sugar content in packaged food at all.
- **And even if they could easily tell how much sugar was in a product, Canadians don’t know how much sugar to aim for.** One quarter of women (24 per cent) said they didn’t know what constitutes an appropriate amount of sugar in a snack for themselves, and one in five said they didn’t know how much sugar is appropriate for snacks for their children. Forty-two per cent of those polled said they didn’t know the maximum suggested total amount of sugar per day for Canadian adults (and virtually all of those who said they did know got the number wrong).



“It is easy to see why consumers may be confused about the amount of sugar they are consuming” says, Gina Sunderland, Registered Dietitian. “Nutrition Facts Tables are not required to differentiate between added versus naturally occurring sugars; and consumers are often not aware that Health Canada recommends a limit of 100 grams of sugar per day. Most are aware it is important to limit sugar intake, but may be uncertain when it comes to making the best food choices for themselves and their families.”

While Canadian regulations do not require food manufacturers to disclose how much of total sugar in their products comes from added sources, an analysis of 40,000 packaged foods by Public Health Ontario and the University of Waterloo found that 66 per cent contain added sugars. Snacks and sweets outranked beverages as the category most likely to contain added sugars, with 86 per cent of products containing at least one added sugar.¹

“It is important to understand not all sources of sugars in snack foods are created equally” says, Gina Sunderland, registered Dietitian. “For example, much of the sugar in KIND® snacks comes from wholesome ingredients like dried cherries, cranberries, blueberries, and apricots. Along with naturally occurring sugars, these dried fruits also provide a range of other key nutrients including iron, vitamin C, and dietary fibre.”

The total amount of sugar in many KIND® bars clock in at just 5 grams, whereas other nutrition bars average about 23 grams, or more than four times the amount in a KIND snack bar. Chocolate bars have an average of 27 grams of sugar.

Conducted in partnership with KIND, Leger’s sugar survey included 992 Canadian women and was completed between March 27-April 1, 2017 using Leger’s online panel, LegerWeb. A probability sample of the same size would yield a margin of error of +/-3.11%, 19 times out of 20.

¹<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/About/Newsroom/Paes/Two-thirds-of-packaged-foods-and-drinks-in-Canada-have-added-sugars.aspx>