

New USDA dietary guidelines validated by sugar research

January 14 2016, by Jyoti Madhusoodanan



Just in time for flailing New Year resolutions, the U.S. Department of Agriculture have served up new dietary guidelines, including one of the biggest changes in recent years: For the first time, they've placed a clear limit of no more than 10 percent of daily calories from added dietary sugars.

The [USDA guidelines](#), which are updated every five years based on the latest advances in nutritional science, specifically refer to sweetened foods such as sodas or candy, not naturally-occurring sugars in milk, fruits or other foods. The new recommendations concur with those of the World Health Organization.

For many UC San Francisco researchers, the [guidelines](#) serve as clear support for recently established campus and citywide initiatives and follow their extensive studies on added [sugar](#) and its impact on health.

"This is the first time the guidelines clearly link sugar with chronic disease based on the evidence," says Laura Schmidt, PhD, MSW, MPH, a health policy researcher at UCSF and lead investigator of [SugarScience](#), a research and education initiative designed to highlight authoritative, evidence-based, scientific findings. "In the past, added sugar guidelines have been very industry friendly, but in this case, for whatever reason, the findings were not what industry or trade groups might have wanted to hear."

Schmidt recalls the process of framing the 2015 guidelines as "one of the more contentious discussions we've seen in a long time," as lobbying groups and trade organizations fought for their interests. Despite the pressures, however, the committee reached the clear 10-percent limit, which is approximately 12-13 teaspoons per day.

"To put it into perspective, that's less than what you would consume in one 12-ounce soda," says Schmidt.

Schmidt and other UCSF researchers have played a significant role in establishing exactly what too much sugar can do to the body. Their research has established strong links between excess sugar consumption and the risks of heart disease, liver disease and diabetes. They found that added sugars are hidden in nearly three-quarters of packaged foods, and

even a simple intervention like swapping sugar for whole-food carbohydrates can lead to big benefits.

Their studies inspired UCSF's Healthy Beverage Initiative, a move that's already gaining more traction. "There's been a tremendous amount of interest in the bold step UCSF took in stopping the sale of sugary beverages on our campuses and throughout the medical center," she says. "Now, it looks like many San Francisco hospitals and beyond are following suit."

While the new USDA guidelines are a start, research suggests that cutting back on sugar even more – to 5 percent of daily calories, roughly 25 grams or 6 teaspoons – might offer [additional health benefits](#).

"Nonetheless, we're happy to see any dietary limit in place at this point," says Schmidt. "The main reason is not necessarily because Americans are always going to read the guidelines and change their habits. But these guidelines define what's allowable on federal food programs that serve low-income groups with few alternatives, the national school lunch program and so on – millions of people served by these programs will see the benefits."

Provided by University of California, San Francisco

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