

Understanding Nutrition Labels and Serving Sizes

What do you reach for on overnight calls to stay awake? Do you know how much sugar you are drinking? According to the World Health Organization, no more than 10% of your calories should come from added sweeteners. The USDA food pyramid calls for a maximum of 4 tablespoons (48 grams) of sugar in a 2,200 calorie diet, which is approximately 9% of your daily calories. For most people, this works out to be between 30-60 grams of sugar per day. However, it is not uncommon for Americans to consume more than 6.5 tablespoons of sugar or more than 30% of their daily calories from sugar!

Understanding how to calculate how much added sugar is in our food and drinks is very important, particularly with the increasing trend of overweight and obesity in Americans! When we think of sugar, we often think of candy or chocolate. However, many of our favorite drinks contain just as much sugar as those candies, if not more. Often we tend to misunderstand nutrition labels because they only reveal information regarding a smaller percentage of the full drink. Therefore, we need to calculate and find what amounts of sugar we truly are consuming.

We can use the following conversions to convert grams of sugar to teaspoon and tablespoon:

4 grams sugar = 1 teaspoon (tsp) sugar

12 grams sugar = 1 tablespoon (tbsp) sugar

For example: a can of soda contains 140 calories and 38 grams of sugar. By dividing 38 grams by 4 grams sugar, we end up with 9.5 teaspoons. By dividing 38 grams by 12 grams sugar, we end up with 3.2 tablespoons of sugar. Therefore, our can of soda contains 9.5 tsp or 3.2 tbsp of sugar. **Can you imagine scooping over 3 tablespoons of sugar into your mouth?**

These are a few more examples:

Full Throttle Energy drink 16oz
2 servings per bottle (8 oz serving)
Per serving = 110 calories, full bottle = 220 calories
Per serving (1/2 can) = 29 grams sugar = 2.4 tbsp
Full can contains 57 grams of sugar = 4.75 tbsp

Starbucks Grande Café Latte 16 oz
1 serving
Per serving = 190 calories
Per serving = 18 grams sugar = 1.5 tbsp

Fruit punch Gatorade 32 oz
2.5 servings per bottle (8 oz serving)
Per serving = 80 calories, full bottle = 176 calories
Per serving (~1/2 bottle) = 14 grams sugar = 1.275tbsp
Full bottle contains 52.5 grams of sugar = 4.38 tbsp

RockStar Energy Drink 16 oz
2 servings per bottle (8 oz serving)
Per serving = 140 calories, full bottle = 420 calories
Per serving (1/2 bottle) = 31 grams sugar = 2.6 tbsp
Full bottle contains 62 grams of sugar = 5.17 tbsp

Mountain Dew 14 oz
Approximately 2 servings per can (8 oz serving)
Per serving = 110 calories, full can = 220 calories
Per serving (1/2 can) = 31 grams of sugar = 2.6 tbsp
Full can contains 62 grams of sugar = 5.2 tbsp

AMP Energy Drink 16 oz
1 serving per can
120 calories
Per serving = 30 grams sugar = 2.5 tbsp

Nantucket Nectars All Natural 100% Apple Juice
Approximately 2 servings per can (8 oz serving)
Per serving = 120 calories, full can = 240 calories
Per serving (1/2 can) = 26 grams sugar = 2.2 tbsp
Full can contains 52 grams sugar = 4.3 tbsp

Red Bull 8 oz
1 serving per can
Per serving = 110 calories
Per serving = 27 grams sugar = 2.25 tbsp

The next time you grab a can of soda or energy drink, take the time to look at the nutrition label. You might be surprised to find out that your favorite candy bar has less sugar than your favorite drink. Now to think about some of our favorite snacks:

Snickers Bar: 230 calories; 30 grams sugar = 2.5 tbsp **WOW! A Snickers bar has LESS sugar than a can of soda!**

There are many new lower calorie snack foods on the market that are better snack picks, but you can still get your sweet fix....such as: Oreo Thin Crisp, 100 calorie packs: 100 calories; 8 grams sugar = 0.6 tbsp

Make reading nutrition labels a habit. Your heart, teeth and waistline will THANK YOU!

References:

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