

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### Hot Syrup

One of the hot topics as we go into the new year is the question of whether or not high fructose corn syrup is dangerous. Is it causing obesity or linked to heart disease, in short, is it good, bad or terrible? It's like the old complaint "Everything I like is either illegal, immoral or fattening!" That's what some people are trying to make high fructose corn syrup.

Let's start with what it is. Most people are familiar with corn starch, that dry white powder we use to thicken pudding. All starch is carbohydrate, long chains of glucose molecules. Because of the way the glucose chains are linked together, starch does not taste sweet on our tongue. If you've ever tasted plain cornstarch, it's more like chalk than sugar. But when we eat corn or purified corn starch the enzymes and acid in our stomach break it down and those glucose molecules are released. Our blood sugar goes up. If we eat too much and don't exercise enough, our weight goes up too.

Years ago, food researchers discovered that if we treated corn starch with acid or enzymes we could release a lot of that sugar without waiting until it got to our stomachs. Now it tasted sweet! And since this whole country loves sweet stuff, that was good! Plus, corn is easier to grow than sugar cane is, and we grow more of it. So corn syrup is less expensive. Most of us know plain corn syrup as the bottle on the shelf, Karo® or other brands, that goes into pecan pies.

But plain corn syrup, while it tastes sweet, has some problems if we try to use it

in many kinds of foods. It makes things get too dark when it's baked. In acid it can change color and flavor. It's too wet and runny. But if some of the glucose is changed to fructose, many of those problems are solved. So now we have 'high fructose' corn syrup, the stuff being blamed for so many of our health problems.

Unfortunately, the evidence for that blame is not good. For one thing, even though the name is 'high fructose', commercial corn syrups are only about half fructose and half glucose. That's exactly what sucrose, or white table sugar is, half and half! High fructose corn syrup is only higher than pure glucose, but it is not really very high in fructose at all.

The American Medical Association recently concluded that high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is no more to blame for overweight or obesity than any other sweetener. HFCS does not have any greater or different effect on our blood sugar levels or insulin, on our appetites, or on our hunger hormones than sugar does.

The studies that claim to 'prove' HFCS is the villain use pure fructose. But that is not HFCS. It's not what we eat, it's not what's in our food. And they put much more fructose in the diets of the rats and mice than we eat in our diets. We don't eat 50% or 80% of our diet as fructose! We can not look at the lab animals and say that's what happens to us.

The problem is that we are eating too much sugar, in all its forms. HFCS is part of the problem. But so are white table sugar, brown sugar, honey, concentrated fruit juice, agave syrup or any other sweetener. We need to eat less of all of them, and fewer calories. Then we'll balance our weight, have fewer heart problems, less diabetes and overall better health. Blaming one sugar because we like sweet foods and drinks is

not good science, or good health.

Here's a delicious fruit sauce to use instead of syrup on your pancakes. It's great over low fat ice cream or frozen yogurt too. With just a touch of added sugar, most of the sweetness comes from the fruit and fruit juice. But it's still sweet! Try it while fresh fall pears are still available.

### Spiced Pear Sauce

6 medium-size fresh pear (about 2 pounds)      ½ tsp cinnamon

½ Cup unsweetened pineapple juice              1/8 tsp ground nutmeg

1 Tbsp sugar

Peel and core pears. Cut into chunks. In heavy saucepan combine pears, juice and spices. Cook over medium-low heat for 30 minutes, stirring frequently. When pears are soft, remove from heat. Add sugar and mash fruit or put through food processor until smooth. Serve warm or cold. Refrigerate leftovers. Makes about 2 cups.

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