

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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## Just Because It Isn't 'Sugar'...

If the phone calls to my office are any indication people are reading food labels, the Nutrient Data box and ingredient lists, a lot more closely these days. That is great news, because those are the parts of a label that you can really trust. Figuring out what all the tiny print really means is another hurdle though. And deciding which ingredients are better or worse than others can be even more difficult.

Take sugars for example. If you're savvy you know that words in the ingredient list that end in -ose are some kind of sugar. The more common are of course sucrose - that's white table sugar, glucose - sometimes called dextrose, and fructose - also known as fruit sugar. Those are easily and fairly rapidly digested and absorbed into our blood. They all give us 4 calories per gram, or about 16 calories per teaspoon.

What about 'sugar alcohols'? Are they sugar or alcohol? Do you have to avoid them if your medication says to not drink alcohol? Common sugar alcohols are xylitol, maltitol, erythritol and lactitol. Most exist naturally but are produced in large quantities for the food industry. They are related to sugar but we don't digest them the same way. They only give us 2 calories per gram, half that of sugar. But too much of any of them will give us diarrhea too. Oops! The bacteria that cause tooth decay can't use them, so they are better for our teeth. And no, they don't affect our livers the way alcohol does so they aren't a problem with medications.

Some other sugars that are showing up more frequently on food labels are things

like cane sugar, cane sugar juice, concentrated cane juice and natural sugar cane. And there are the various brown sugars - turbinado, demarara, muscovado. These all come from the same source - sugar cane. They are just various steps in the process of removing the water from sugar cane juice and purifying the sugar. The amounts of various minerals in these products is very little, so little that most really are not significant in our diets. Some, such as calcium, we can absorb more easily from other foods. To get others in significant amounts from these sugar products would mean eating many more calories of sugar than most of us need.

Then there are the fruit juices used as sweeteners. Most are added as fruit juice concentrates. If you have ever tasted a drop of frozen orange juice concentrate before you dilute it, you will know how sweet it is. It has all the sugar of 4 times as much fruit, minus all the water. It's like 4 oranges squeezed into 1 orange peel, so of course it's sweet. Grape, apple and pear juices are often used because they are so sweet and have a mild flavor.

True, the sugar in fruit juice is not table sugar or corn syrup, but it is still sugar. A lot of it is fructose, which is not absorbed as fast as glucose, but is still absorbed. It still has as many calories as 4 times as much fruit juice, minus the water, the fiber and some of the minerals. It can say 'fruit juice' on the label or in the ingredient list, but it's still sugar and it still shows up on the Total Carbohydrate line of the label. And while it may have a few minerals or other micro-nutrients, you have to eat a lot of calories before you get a significant amount of them from this juice.

Some unusual syrup sweeteners are agave syrup and rice syrup. These too have all the calories of sugar. Because they have some soluble fiber and more complex

carbohydrates the sugar may be absorbed more slowly. But they still have all those calories. So read the labels, including the total calories line. Just because it doesn't say sugar doesn't mean it's healthier.

Here's a different way to serve fruit. Make it when you're baking something else. It's super easy to mix up and slide into the oven when you take dinner out. It will be ready to eat by the time you're ready for dessert. Top with a sprinkle of low fat granola for some crunch, or a scoop of low fat frozen yogurt for a special treat.

### Spicy Warm Fruit

1-16 oz can peaches in juice or light syrup      1-16 oz can pears in juice or light syrup

1 tsp cinnamon, nutmeg or mixture of the two      2 Tbsp honey

Drain canned fruit. (Save juice to drink for a snack.) Combine drained fruit in 1 ½ qt baking dish. Mix honey and spice in small dish, then drizzle over fruit. Cover dish.

Bake 25 min in 350° F oven. Stir once during baking. Serves 6.

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