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Added Sugar: Friend or Foe?

Nutrition Experts Weigh in on the Growing Commentary,

While Moms Rank Added Sugar as a Leading Reason for Leaving a Snack on the Grocery Shelf

FRESNO, Calif. – May 4, 2012 – The ongoing dialogue on added sugars in the American diet took center stage at the recent California Dietetic Association annual meeting as a panel of registered dietitians discussed both the role and the risks.

The panel, led by James Painter, Ph.D., RD, of Eastern Illinois University and national scientific advisor to the California Raisin Marketing Board, asserted that small amounts of sugars added to foods, such as chocolate milk or salad dressings, are a reasonable way to enhance palatability and promote increased calcium intake and consumption of nutritious vegetables, respectively.

“Sugar itself is not a nutritional villain, but empty calories are,” Painter said. “My concern is when healthy nutrients are *replaced* with added sugar. The result is empty calories that provide no nutritional value.”

Painter and fellow panelists, Allison Beadle, RD, and Michelle Dudash, RD, shared that some highly processed dried fruit, such as fried banana chips and sugar-infused dried cranberries, are examples of foods that lose nutrients, but increase in saturated fats and substantial amounts of added sugar, respectively, during processing.

In the case of sweetened dried cranberries, potassium and vitamin C dramatically decrease during processing, while at the same time sugar is added. Sweetened dried cranberries contain at least 40-percent added sugar, which translates into about the same amount of added sugar found in an eight-ounce serving of regular soda (based on calculations using the leading national brand of sweetened dried cranberries).

In terms of public opinion, a recent national survey commissioned by California Raisins reveals moms are sour on added sugars. In fact, nearly half of the 1,003 moms surveyed said added sugar is a leading reason why they would leave a snack product on the grocery store shelf. In the survey, moms ranked added sugar second only after trans- and saturated-fats in terms of ingredients that cause them to avoid purchasing a product.

“Consumers have many choices in the grocery aisle, and it can be hard to determine what is truly healthy and what is merely hype,” Painter said. “As a rule – simple, natural foods are almost always more nutritious than highly processed options. This is because extensive processing often results in nutrients lost as nutrient-void ingredients – like sugars or colorings – are added.”

Added sugar is receiving a growing share of nutrition-related commentary catapulted by a report issued earlier this year by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics that indicates foods contribute significantly more added-sugar calories than beverages. The report found that 59 percent of added-sugar calories come from foods compared with 41 percent that come from beverages. According to the report, the consumption of added sugars has been associated with measures of cardiovascular disease risk among adolescents, including adverse cholesterol levels.

“Bottom-line, sugar can make certain healthy foods more palatable, but when nutrients are reduced and replaced with added sugars – such as in the case of sugar-infused dried fruit – you remove the reason to eat the food in the first place,” said Painter. “By contrast, traditional, no-sugar-added dried fruits, like California Raisins, are healthy, naturally sweet and nutrient dense. There simply is no need for added sugars and the empty calories that come with it.”

About the California Raisin Marketing Board

A State Marketing Order in 1998 created the California Raisin Marketing Board and it is 100 percent grower funded. Its mission is to support and promote the increased use of California-grown raisins and sponsor crop production, nutrition and market research. For more information about all-natural, no-sugar added California Raisins, please visit www.letskeepitreal.com or www.loveyourraisins.com.

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