

Rethink Your Drink Learning About Added Sugar With A Low-Cost Activity And Tool



This is a “low-cost” nutrition education tool facilitated by nutritionists at The Barbados Diabetes Centre.

Soft drinks and other sugar sweetened beverages provide no nutritional benefits but are prime sources of extra calories that can contribute to weight gain and obesity. Patients were unable to decode the mysteries of the food label, especially the sugar content of beverages and the many disguises of added sugar.

For the nutrition education session, patients brought in the container of a beverage they consumed during the week and went through the exercise of learning about calories and the grams equivalent of sugar:

- 1 teaspoon = 4 grams
- 1 gram = 4 calories
- 1 cube = 2.5 grams

After doing the calculations for each beverage, they spooned the amount of sugar into the bags themselves. To say they were shocked is a vast understatement. They then considered all the other added sugars they consumed during the day – from sneaking a teaspoon into the breakfast beverage, the sweet biscuit with afternoon tea and another teaspoon into the hot chocolate at bedtime. They were flabbergasted at the total amount they were consuming during the day.

THE MANY DISGUISES OF SUGAR

Patients were then given insights into the secrets of the manufacturers. Manufacturers are required to list ingredients in descending order – the highest quantity first. To avoid having “sugar” as the first ingredient, food manufacturers may use multiple forms of sugar– each with a different name – and list each one individually on the nutrient label. By using this tactic, sugars are represented separately in smaller amounts, making it more difficult for consumers to determine how much overall sugar is in a product.

Patients learnt to hunt out the sugar in its many disguises: glucose, fructose, sucrose, dextrose, brown sugar, honey, corn syrup, maple syrup, molasses, evaporated cane juice, inverted sugar, hydrolysed starch, fruit puree, fruit juice.

Patients ended the session knowing:

- (a) their bodies metabolizes all added sugars the same way
- (b) the body does not distinguish between “brown sugar” and “honey”
- (c) how spot all sources of added sugars even if they’re not listed as the first few ingredients
- (d) their favourite cola beverages contain 53 grams or 13 teaspoons of added sugar and 212 calories to their recommended total.