

FOR NON-ORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Dietary Advice

Background

A healthy diet plays a significant role in maintaining good oral health. Conversely, certain foods and beverages can contribute to tooth decay, gum disease and erosion of tooth enamel.

In their course of their work, other health and care professionals, such as caregivers, and health workers, can play a crucial role in providing diet counselling to promote better oral health and prevent dental issues. Diet counselling involves educating individuals about the impact of dietary choices on their health, including their oral health, and on providing them with information that will encourage them to choose healthier food options.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that an adult's daily intake of free sugars should be less than 10% of their total energy intake. A further reduction to below 5% has been shown to provide additional health benefits¹. Free sugars are added to packaged foods and beverages such as cakes, biscuits, sweets, some soft drinks, and milkshakes. They also naturally occur in honey, syrups and juices. (Sugars that are in milk and whole fruit and vegetables do not count as free sugars.)

A balanced and nutritious diet, low in free sugars and acidic food and drinks, can help prevent tooth decay, promote healthy gums, and support overall health and well-being².



FIGURE 1 - SUGAR CONTENT OF TYPICAL FOODS & DRINKS - IN TEASPOONS

FOOD TYPE	SUGAR CONTENT			
Savoury Foods	Serving of Pasta Sauce	Portion of Baked Beans	Supermarket 'Ready Meal'	Dollop of Ketchup
	2.5	2.5	4.6	1
Sweet Foods	Frosted Breakfast Cereal (1 Serving)	Blueberry Muffin	Snack Bar	Flavoured Low-Fat Yoghurt (1 Pot)
	3	5.5	2.5	5.5
Drinks	Smoothie	Energy Drink	Fruit Juice Serving	Pint of Beer
	5	5.5	4.5	4

N.B.1 - Approximate measurements which will vary according to brand

N.B.2 - 4g of sugar = one teaspoon. Adults should have no more than 7.5 teaspoons of sugar per day

Key components of oral health

When providing diet counselling for oral health, other healthcare professionals should focus on the following key components:

- Sugar and Tooth Decay:** Explain the link between sugar consumption and tooth decay, emphasizing the importance of limiting the intake of free sugars to less than 10% of total energy intake (12 teaspoons), as recommended by WHO. Discuss the additional benefits of reducing sugar intake to below 5% of total energy intake (5-6 teaspoons for adults). Check Figure 1 for free sugar in some types of food.
- Acidic Foods and Beverages:** Discuss the impact of acidic foods and drinks, such as citrus fruits, soft drinks, and fruit juices, on tooth enamel erosion, and recommend reducing consumption and limiting to mealtimes or opting for water or milk instead.
- Balanced Diet:** Encourage a well-balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and dairy products to support overall oral health and prevent dental problems.
- Snacking Habits:** Address the impact of frequent snacking on oral health, and recommend choosing healthier snacks, such as nuts, cheese, and fresh fruits, over sugary and processed options.
- Hydration:** Stress the importance of staying properly hydrated for good oral health, as adequate water intake can help neutralize acids, wash away food particles, and promote saliva production.

Oral healthcare delivery framework and oral cancer

It is essential for health professionals to understand their patient's dietary habits.

Ask

- Obtain information about the individual's current dietary habits, preferences, and any known food allergies or restrictions. Discuss their understanding of the connection between diet and oral health.

Look

- Assess the individual's dietary habits and identify areas that may have a negative impact on their oral health, such as excessive sugar consumption, frequent snacking, or inadequate intake of dental-friendly food and drinks.

Decide

- Based on your assessment, determine the most effective way to provide diet counselling tailored to the individual's needs and preferences, incorporating evidence-based guidelines and research findings. If necessary, refer the patient to a dentist or a nutritionist.

Act

- Offer guidance on making healthier dietary choices, focusing on the key components of diet counselling for oral health. Provide practical tips and suggestions for incorporating dental-friendly foods and beverages into their daily routine, while emphasizing the importance of limiting free sugars and acidic foods and drinks.

Document

- Keep a record of your diet counselling sessions, including the individual's dietary habits, areas of concern, and any progress made. Use this document to monitor their progress and adjust your counselling approach as needed, ensuring that the recommendations remain aligned with the latest evidence-based guidelines and research.

This factsheet is supported by:



References

1. Moynihan, P, Makino, Y, Petersen, PE, Ogawa, H. Implications of WHO Guideline on Sugars for dental health professionals. *Community Dent Oral Epidemiol.* 2018; 46: 1– 7. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdoe.12353> [Accessed on 13 March 2024].
2. FDI World Dental Federation. A practical guide to reduce sugars consumption and curb the epidemic of dental caries. Available from: https://www.fdiworlddental.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/sugar_toolkit-fdi-2016.pdf [Accessed on 13 March 2024].

Other Resources

1. FDI World Dental Federation. Educational module for other healthcare professionals. Available from: Educational Module for Other Healthcare Professionals | FDI (fdiworlddental.org) [Accessed on 13 March 2024].
2. FDI World Dental Federation. FDI Position on Free Sugars. Available from: https://www.fdiworlddental.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/EN_FDI_Position%20statement%20on%20free%20sugars.pdf [Accessed on 13 March 2024].
3. FDI World Dental Federation. Oral Health in Comprehensive Cleft Care. Available from: [Oral health in comprehensive cleft care](#) | FDI (fdiworlddental.org) [Accessed on 13 March 2024].



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This fact sheet offers general information and may require adaptation to suit the scope of work and regulations governing other healthcare professionals in each country.

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