

Think Outside the “artificial” Pink, Blue & Yellow Packets

By Zonya Foco, R.D.

Looking to sweeten your oatmeal with less calories and carbs? Let me make this suggestion. Instead of automatically trading sugar for one of those pink, blue or yellow packets, put a full teaspoon of cinnamon on your oatmeal. That’s right. Cinnamon provides the illusion of sweetness so you can use half the sugar. Cinnamon also contains polyphenols that help your body metabolize sugars efficiently, and a full teaspoon is the amount used in the studies to determine this benefit. And it tastes great!

Now, instead of drinking a huge glass of fruit juice WITH your oatmeal, put this natural sugar INTO your oatmeal. That’s right; add chopped apple, peach, strawberries or 2 tablespoons of raisins. The natural sugar provided in the fruit means you won’t have to add ANY additional sugar or artificial sweeteners to give it an acceptable sweet taste. In addition to learning to enjoy your oatmeal a little less sweet, you’re getting beneficial antioxidants, polyphenols and extra fiber!



Taming Your Sweet Tooth

When looking to reduce the amount of calories and carbs from sugar, please understand that the first goal for everyone, with or without diabetes, is something we rarely hear anyone say. That is that we first need to “dial down our sweet acuity” or our perceptual keenness for sweets. Our culture has taught us to LOVE things TOO sweet. Thanks to cereal manufacturers, cookie makers, doughnut makers and soda and juice producers who want us to fall so madly in love with their products that we actually begin to crave them. Manufacturers know that to make their products popular means MAKING THEM SWEET!



The problem is that when people begin addressing their need to reduce the amount of sugar in their diets because of one health concern or another, they don’t think about “dialing down” the amount of sweetness, they just think “artificial sweeteners” and keep the level of sweetness as high or even higher. For example, someone who drinks three regular sodas a day and is then diagnosed with diabetes may think, “I’ll just switch to diet soda.” The switch for this person shouldn’t be from “regular to diet,” it should be from “soda pop to water,” saving a diet soda for an occasional treat only.

People think they need that sweet soda every day to be satisfied, but water is a wonderful thirst quencher and hydrator for your body. It’s also very satisfying with a slice of lemon or packet of True Lemon, True Lime or True Orange added for a hint of flavor. I also put 2 ounces of 100-percent fruit juice in a tall glass of water to make my own fruit-flavored water. IT’S DELICIOUS! My whole family does this and we can no longer drink a glass of undiluted fruit juice or can of soda because they’re both just too sweet for us.



The American Diabetes Association prefers that the recipes in my *Lickety-Split Meals* cookbook use sugar instead of Splenda® or other artificial sweeteners. Isn't that interesting? People with diabetes can have sugar, they just have to keep the portion small and "make room" for it by eating less bread and other carbohydrates at the meal to accommodate for it. And since my desserts have half the sugar usually called for in recipes, the total carbs are acceptable to the American Diabetes Association guidelines. And remember that portion size is always a key factor when managing sugar intake.



When you're ready to reduce the amount of sugar and related calories in your diet, your first step is to TAME YOUR SWEET TOOTH. The next step is to train your mind to start thinking outside the pink, blue and yellow packets and instead choose natural sweetness from foods "close to the farm." Remember that artificial sweeteners are just that – artificial. Splenda is made by putting a chlorine atom onto the sugar molecule, rendering it zero calories to the human body. Whenever we mess with nature, we tend to pay the price (partially hydrogenated oils; i.e., trans fats, are a perfect case in point).

