What is Sugar?

Glucose is the simple sugar in your body that gives your cells energy. Glucose comes from carbohydrates in the foods you eat such as grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy, desserts, and candy. Your body makes a hormone called insulin to absorb sugar.

Sugar and Cancer

Glucose “feeds” all the cells in your body. Cancer cells need sugar to grow just like healthy cells do, but sugar does not feed cancer cells any more than it feeds the other cells in your body.

Should I Eat Sugar?

Even if there is no sugar in your diet, your body will still make sugar from the protein and fat you eat. Although sugar doesn’t feed cancer, it is a good idea to limit the amount of refined sugar you eat. Eating a lot of simple sugar can cause your body to produce more insulin. Your body needs insulin to function, but it is unhealthy if you make too much of it.

Eating a balanced diet with carbohydrates, protein, fiber, and fat will help your body process sugar in a more healthy way. Complex carbohydrates such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and lentils help your body digest sugar slower and reduce the amount of insulin your body needs to absorb sugar.

Avoiding all foods with carbohydrates can be unsafe during cancer treatment. When you avoid all carbohydrates, you can weaken your body and make it harder to fight cancer.

Avoiding all sugars can also cause stress. Stress can raise the amount of sugar in your blood and decrease how well your immune system works.

Tips to Manage Sugar in Your Diet

- **Read food labels.** Avoid foods that have added sugar, brown sugar, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, or other sweeteners near the top of the ingredient list.
- **Limit sugary drinks.** Watch for soda, sports drinks, lattes, or sweetened teas with more than 10 grams of added sugar per serving. Choose water most often.
- **Eat fruit instead of drinking fruit juice.** If you drink juice, limit to six ounces of 100% fruit juice once a day.
- **Eat whole, unprocessed foods.** Vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, and seeds have more fiber and are healthier for you.
- **Limit desserts.** If you eat dessert, stick to small servings a couple of times a week.
- **Ask for advice.** If you have a hard time getting enough nutrition during cancer treatment, talk to your doctor or dietitian.

Examples of Healthy Snacks

These ideas are healthy ways to balance carbohydrates, protein, fat, and fiber.

- Almond butter and banana
- Fruit smoothie with milk and yogurt
- Greek yogurt and strawberries
- Hummus and whole wheat pita bread or veggies
- Nuts and dried fruit
- Peanut butter and crackers
- String cheese and vegetables
- Tuna salad and whole grain toast
- Turkey and avocado wrap
- Turkey chili soup and a baked potato
- Yogurt and apple slices

Dietitians from Huntsman Cancer Institute’s Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness and Integrative Health Center offer personalized nutrition counseling for patients and their families.

To make an appointment or for more information, call 801-587-4585.