

# Health Tips

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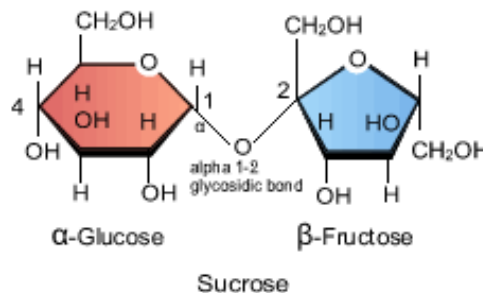
Dr. D


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## Health Tip: Is all Sugar the Same?

Part 1. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet"  
William Shakespeare

Americans use several types of sugar to satisfy their "sweet tooth". The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated in 2005 that we consumed about 58 pounds of table sugar per person, about 62 pounds of High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) per person, and about 2 pounds of honey and syrup per person. Arguments have been made for the benefits (or health concerns) of each of these, but how do they differ and is one really more or less healthy than the other?



Both glucose and fructose are monosaccharides, a word that literally means "single sugar". Monosaccharides are the most basic building blocks of carbohydrates. When two monosaccharides are connected biochemically, this is called a disaccharide (two sugars), such as sucrose and lactose. As a disaccharide, sucrose consists of

equal parts glucose and fructose. Sucrose occurs in high concentration in sugar cane and sugar beets which are the primary sources for common table sugar. High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is also a combination of glucose and fructose. The main difference between sucrose and HFCS is that corn syrup (mostly glucose) is enzymatically processed to convert some of its glucose into fructose. The HFCS used to sweeten soft drinks is approximately 55% fructose and 45% glucose. Like HFCS, honey's sweetness comes from the monosaccharides fructose and glucose. A typical analysis of honey would show it to be approximately 38% fructose, 31% glucose, 10% other sugars and the rest water. So, if you've been following this lesson in biochemistry---table sugar, HFCS and honey are all made of the same thing---glucose and fructose---just in slightly different proportions.

**Isn't raw sugar better for you than white sugar?**

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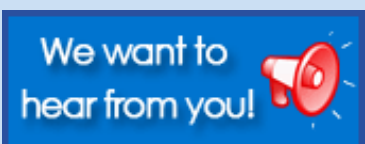
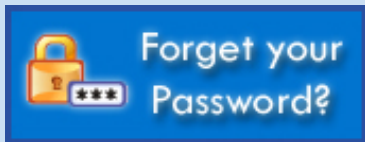


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Technically, raw sugar is produced during the refining of sugar cane and has too many impurities to be safely consumed. The more accurate term for the less processed version of sucrose is turbinado sugar. It gets its name from the centrifuge (or turbine) that is used to spin sugar cane juice into the characteristic large, light brown crystals. The color comes from a small amount of molasses that is

allowed to remain on the sugar crystal, but it is still approximately 98% sucrose. Hence, turbinado sugar, like refined white sugar is essentially sucrose---half glucose and half fructose. Unlike brown rice compared to the more processed white rice, there is almost no additional nutritional value to eating turbinado sugar, although the molasses does have a few beneficial minerals.

**Surely honey must be better for you than refined sugar.**

Honey has roughly the same sweetness as refined sugar which makes sense when you consider that it is mostly made of the same building blocks---fructose and glucose. Honey does contain some vitamins and minerals including calcium, sodium, phosphorus, magnesium, silicon, iron, manganese, copper, Vitamin A, Vitamin B12, Vitamin C, Vitamin E and folic acid. These occur in trace amounts, however, and honey cannot be considered a significant source for these micronutrients. Thus, there is very little nutritional difference between honey and sugar. Since it weighs more than sugar, a teaspoon of honey contains slightly more carbohydrate and calories. Perhaps the main reason to use honey over table sugar is a taste preference. Diabetics should be careful because honey, like sugar, will cause an increase in blood sugar. The degree of blood sugar elevation is the same with either, so there is no advantage for diabetics to substitute honey for sugar in their diets.



Back to the Shakespeare quote, what matters is what something is, not what it is called. There is really very little difference nutritionally between turbinado sugar and honey. Next week, we'll look closely at refined sugar and the much maligned product, high fructose corn syrup. Once we've looked at all four types of sweeteners, I'll draw some conclusions regarding the health benefits and dangers of use of the various types of natural sweeteners.

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