

NUTRITION NUGGET # 14

Is Agave healthier than sugar?



Answer: Agave is a type of sugar marketed as a natural sweetener. Agave has calories and no vitamins or minerals. Eat Agave nectar with moderation.

Facts:

- Agave is a type of nutritive sweetener or sugar. Agave nectar is used as added sugar to flavor energy drinks, teas, nutrition bars or recipes.
- Most agave sweeteners come from the blue agave plant, typically found in Mexico and South America. “Honey water” from the plant is processed and refined to form agave nectar or syrup.
- Agave nectar is popular because its glycemic index (GI) is lower than other sweeteners. This means Agave will increase blood sugar levels, though not as quickly as sugar. However, the American Diabetes Association suggests treating Agave as any sweetener, like sugar or honey and to count it in when meal planning.
- Agave can be seen as a high-fructose sugar (55-90% fructose; rest is glucose). Eating too much fructose can be unhealthy. A study in the Journal of Clinical Investigation found that 10-week consumption of fructose-sweetened beverages increased amount of fat in blood, lowered insulin sensitivity & increased abdominal fat in overweight adults.
- Like sugar, agave provides the body with energy or calories. Missing in agave is fiber, vitamins & minerals (see examples below).



Table sugar has 40 calories, 12 grams of sugar per tablespoon.



Agave nectar has 60 calories, 16 grams of sugar per tablespoon.

Apply: What skills can you teach participants when buying sugars? Which foods can we promote instead of natural sweeteners?

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References: <http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/the-truth-about-agave>; <http://www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/treatment-and-care/ask-the-expert/ask-the-dietitian/archives/is-agave-nectar-safe-for.html>; <http://www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/treatment-and-care/ask-the-expert/ask-the-dietitian/archives/index.jsp?page=32#is-agave-nectar-ok-for-people.html>; <http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/food-composition/nutritive-and-nonnutritive-sweetener-resources>, <http://www.jci.org/articles/view/37385>. **Images:** http://www.wholesomesweeteners.com/brands/wholesome_sweeteners/organic_raw_blue_agave.html; <http://thesingletatus.com/2012/09/sugar-addict/http://site.rockbottomgolf.com/scratch-the-cavemans-blog/2012/10/page/2>. Accessed 06/20/13.