

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Easter's On Its ... Weigh?

Coldwater, MI. Hello Peter Cotton Tail... Hopping Down the Bunny Trail... Easter's on its.... Way... or is it 'Weigh'? Each year, children and adults alike, can't wait for Easter morning to come when they can feast on chocolate bunnies, peeps and jelly beans galore! In fact, according to the National Confectioner's Association, Easter is the second most important candy-eating occasion in the year. In 2011, Americans spent more than \$2 billion dollars on Easter candy and consumed more 7 billion pounds of it.

So is eating all that sugar healthy? "No." states Dave Fowler, WIC Coordinator for the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency. "According to the Journal of the American Heart Association (AHA), getting too much 'added sugar' in your diet could significantly increase your risk of dying from cardiovascular disease." Added sugars are sugars and syrups that are added to foods or beverages during processing or preparation. Added sugars include:

- sugar-sweetened beverages,
- grain-based desserts,
- fruit drinks,
- dairy desserts,
- candy,
- some ready-to-eat cereals and
- yeast breads,

Added sugars do NOT include naturally occurring sugar, such as those found in milk or fruits. Unfortunately, American children, on average, consume 20 or more teaspoons of added sugar daily, which represents 320 or more in empty calories. Not only do the calories lack nutritional value, they can interfere with your efforts to establish healthy eating behaviors and can contribute to negative health consequences, such as picky eating habits and tooth decay.

The AHA has established guidelines that limit the amount of added sugar considered acceptable for a healthy diet in children. Preschoolers, averaging 1,200 to 1,400 calories a day, should limit their added sugar to about 4 teaspoons a day. Children ages 4-8, with a daily caloric intake of 1,600 calories, should consume no more than 3 teaspoons a day. As a child grows into the pre-teen and teen years, the caloric range increases to 1,800 to 2,000 a day, meaning that the maximum amount of added should be limited to 5 to 8 teaspoons. (note: 1 tsp = 4 grams of sugar)

Dave Fowler adds “While the occasional sugar splurge will not hurt you or your child, exceeding the recommended guidelines regularly does contribute to obesity, high blood pressure and high cholesterol – all known risk factors for chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Through the WIC program, we can help you develop healthy eating behaviors, teach you how to read labels and provide you with nutritious foods that can help you and your family establish a healthy lifestyle.”

WIC stands for Women, Infants and Children program and it is a supplemental food and nutrition program that is free of charge for participants. The program is designed to correct or prevent poor nutrition in pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding women, infants and children up to age 5 who are eligible. WIC provides supplemental food, offers professional nutrition education, and makes referrals based on health screening and assessments of need. To learn more about the WIC program and to find out if you qualify, just contact the health department or visit our website at www.bhsj.org. WIC is an equal opportunity provider.

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