

Sweeten Without Sugar

Substitutes are easier than ever to find and, unlike the white stuff, they have health benefits.

1. COCONUT SUGAR

Made from the sap of coconut-tree blossoms, this sweetener is loaded with zinc, potassium, iron, and vitamin B. "It also contains less fructose than table sugar, which is helpful because fructose is tough for your body to break down and metabolize," says New York City nutritionist Stephanie Middleberg.

BEST USES: Despite the name, there's no coconut flavor; it has more of a caramel taste, which works well in coffee or tea. Because it's granular, it's also a great substitute for white or brown sugar in recipes.

options because it has no calories or carbs, and studies suggest it may help control insulin resistance," says holistic nutritionist Lisa Turner. **BEST USES:** Flavor oatmeal, yogurt, cereal, and drinks with just a touch — stevia is far sweeter than sugar, and leaves a bitter, licorice-like aftertaste if you overdo it.

4. BLACKSTRAP MOLASSES

A by-product of sugarcane, "this sweetener is high in minerals, especially magnesium, which is helpful to a healthy metabolism," Turner says. That's a mineral that around two-thirds of us don't get enough of in our diets. **BEST USES:** This type of molasses tastes bitter on its own, but it will add a rich, smoky sweetness to spicy or savory dishes and baked goods like gingerbread.

5. RAW HONEY

Make sure your bottle says RAW to ensure you're getting disease-fighting antioxidants that could otherwise be destroyed during pasteurization. "You eat it exactly like it comes out of the hive," Turner says. Raw honey can fight colds and sore throats, kill antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and reduce symptoms of respiratory infections. **BEST USES:** Stir it into coffee, tea, smoothies, and oatmeal, or spread it on bread for sandwiches. It's creamier and richer than regular honey, so a little goes a long way.

NUTRITION

2. MAPLE SYRUP

Research shows that pure maple syrup — straight from the tree, not the cheap stuff made from corn syrup flavored with maple extract — can contain up to 54 antioxidant compounds, some of which may help combat cancer and diabetes.

BEST USES: Besides pouring it over pancakes, try this spicy syrup in homemade ice cream, barbecue sauce, salad dressing, and glazes or gravies for pork.

3. STEVIA

It may sound like a gimmicky name for an artificial sweetener, but stevia is actually a natural sugar substitute derived from the leaves of the South American stevia plant. "It's one of your best

ONE TO AVOID: AGAVE NECTAR

Though derived from the agave plant, this syrup is just as processed as regular sugar and can contain up to 97 percent fructose — more than high-fructose corn syrup. "Limit intake just as you would for table sugar," cautions Middleberg.



FOOD STYLING BY SHARON SWAN FOR HALLET

photograph by SVEND LIND

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