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Gemma is studying Dietetics at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, a 3rd year student and Vice President of the universities Dietetic Society, has a particular interest gastroenterology, especially IBD. She is passionate about public health and older adult care and hopes to work in a public health role once graduated.

## SUGAR IS THE BUZZ WORD!

**#sugar – it’s the buzz word of the moment and I believe will be for some time yet. Everywhere I turn I’m bombarded with Tweets, Facebook links, magazine articles and TV shows all slating the white stuff and telling us we need to cut back. The 2015 SACN report “why 5%” makes recommendations that adults don’t consume more than 5% of daily calorie intake in free sugar or no more than 30g per day. It reported that average intakes of free sugars across all age groups ranged from 49-64g/day in females and 63-84g/day in males. I’m more than aware that we need to be reducing our consumption however as a self confessed sugar addict I decided to see exactly how much I was consuming (it wasn’t easy reading)!**

The task of recording my free sugar intakes wasn’t exactly straight forward as nutritional labelling isn’t geared up to provide this information. I was able to see the total sugars however I only wanted to know about the free sugar. Armed with product info, online manufacturing resources and a calculator I was able to work out the free sugars. This was time consuming and at times a little complicated so whilst I see benefit in having these guidelines I don’t see how the general public are meant to adopt these guidelines when labelling isn’t clear. I strongly believe there needs to be changes to food labelling so consumers can see exactly how much of the total sugars is free sugars.

On average I was consuming a rather shameful amount of sugar, just over 100g per day. I had anticipated I would be at higher end of average however I was shocked at just quite how high my intakes were. I’m very fit and active and my weight is low so I thought I was doing ok. Looking at my diet made me realise I use sugary drinks and chocolate as a way to keep me going through the day as my diet isn’t providing enough calories for my expenditure.

I took a typical days diet where I had consumed 104g of free sugar and set about making changes that would reduce the sugar content. I wanted to keep the diet as similar as possible but make smart changes. I was able to make the biggest sugar saving at breakfast, saving 17.2g. I achieved this by swapping my full fat Activia yoghurt for a low fat one as it contains less sugar through introduction of sweeteners. I swapped to an alternative brand of granola and kept portion size the same. I still continued to eat the melon as this is not classed as free sugar. However I did swap my usual 200ml glass of Tropicana orange for 200ml of Tropicana 50/50 orange. This was essentially a watered down version with addition of sweeteners. It’s an option but I’d rather just have the normal stuff but limit my intake.

*I did swap my usual glass of Tropicana Orange for Tropicana 50/50 orange... I'd rather just have the normal stuff but limit my intake*

Snacking saw me consume high levels of sugar as I tend to consume sugary hot beverages and chocolate. I decided to swap my bar of chocolate with a Nakd cocoa bar which still gave me a chocolate taste but provided me with no free sugars and more nutritional benefits. I swapped my evening bag of peanut M&M's with cashew nuts and 2 squares of dark chocolate which gave me a sugar saving of 19g. I don't like tea or coffee which is why I drink a lot of hot chocolate so whilst I didn't want to cut it out all together I wanted to reduce it. I swapped my usual low calorie hot chocolate for a green tea with lemon. This alone saved almost 5g of sugar. I struggled with the green tea as I'm used to a sweeter taste however I know it's something I can adjust to. I still had one hot chocolate which I make with milk and dark chocolate however instead of making it with the recommended 4 tsp I used just 3 tsp of chocolate flakes. I did notice a small difference but not enough to be bothered about. Generally at lunch and dinner time my sugar intakes were low. I usually have a lot of home made soup and low fat protein and complex carbohydrates.

However I was able to cut back on some sugar by making my own vegetable pasta sauce which I made from fresh tomatoes instead of using a jar. Previously I would just use a jar and they contain added sugar which isn't actually necessary. Finally by adding no added sugar hot sauce to my cottage cheese instead of sweet chilli dipping sauce I was able to save almost 8 g of sugar and I enjoyed it just the same.

I found this experience extremely valuable and eye opening. It was useful for when I qualify as I can relate to my own experiences to assist my patients make small dietary changes that make a big difference. I might not be overweight but doesn't mean I'm not at risk of health and dental problems. Since putting this together I have made positive changes in my diet which has seen my intakes of free sugars dramatically reduced whilst increasing my overall macro and micronutrient intakes. Overall my free sugar intake is around 25g so within guideline. I feel better for it and don't have as many up and downs in energy that I once had. It's all about moderation so I will still have a bar of milk chocolate from time to time!

Before	Item	Sugar (g)	Comment
<b>Breakfast</b>	Melon		Galia
	Acivia regular yoghurt	8.8	Fruit flavoured
	Dorset Granola	6.9	45g serving
	Fresh orange juice	16	200ml serving
<b>Snack</b>	Rich hot chocolate	6.5	200ml s/k milk & 4 tsp of chocolate nibs
<b>Lunch</b>	Carrot and corriander soup		Homemade
	Rice cakes		Unsalted
	Sweet Chilli dipping sauce	7.6	2 x tsp
<b>Snack</b>	Options Hot Choc	4.75	1 x sachet (11g)
	Dairy Milk bar	25	Unable to define "free" and milk sugars
<b>Dinner</b>	Pasta		Wholemeal
	Tomato sauce	2.3	Standard supermarket jar (added sugar)
	Salad & dressing	1.6	1 x tbsp french dressing
	Beetroot		Cooked
	Coleslaw		Homemade
<b>Snack</b>	Peanut M&M's	25	1 x standard bag
<b>TOTAL FREE SUGAR</b>		<b>104.45</b>	

After	Item	Sugar (g)	Comment
<b>Breakfast</b>	Melon		Galia
	Acivia low fat	2.4	Fruit flavoured (sweeteners used)
	Lizzi's Granola	4.1	45g serving
	Tropicana 50/50 orange	8	200ml serving- more sweeteners and watered down
<b>Snack</b>	Rich hot chocolate	4.8	200ml s/k milk & 3 tsp of chocolate nibs
<b>Lunch</b>	Vegetable soup		Homemade
	Rice cakes		Unsalted
	Hot Chilli Sauce		1 x tsp
<b>Snack</b>	Green tea & lemon		
	Nakd cocoa bar		Made with fruit and nuts
<b>Dinner</b>	Pasta		Wholemeal
	Tomato sauce		Homemade with veg and fresh tomatoes
	Salad & dressing		Used olive oil & balsamic
	Beetroot		Cooked
	Coleslaw		Homemade
<b>Snack</b>	Cashews & dark chocolate	6	25g of dark chocolate
<b>TOTAL FREE SUGAR</b>		<b>25.3</b>	