

# NUTRITION SNACKS: NATURAL SWEETENERS

Natural sweeteners are sugar substitutes derived from plants or natural sources. They can be divided into two categories – those that contain little or no kilojoules and those that do contain kilojoules.

## TYPES OF NATURAL SWEETENERS

### Low or No Kilojoule

Low or no kilojoule natural sweeteners are often many times sweeter than sugar and contribute little to no extra kilojoules. The most common are Stevia, monk fruit sweetener and sugar alcohols (Xylitol, Erythritol). While they do come from a natural source, they do still go through extensive processing to extract the sweet compound and produce the final product.

### Those that contain kilojoules

This includes sweeteners such as honey, agave syrup and coconut sugar however these are all just varying forms of sugar and can still contribute significant kilojoules. Some believe these forms of sugar to be healthier as they contain vitamins and minerals or fibre, which may be true however for the small amount you would have you would only be getting a tiny amount that would have little benefit.

## HOW CAN THEY BE USED?

Low kilojoule natural sweeteners can provide an alternative to sugar without the extra kilojoules. Similarly to artificial sweeteners this may help as a first step to gradually cut down on their sugar intake.

However, while replacing sugar with a sweetener helps to reduce kilojoules, relying on overly sweet products isn't a healthy habit in the long term. So we recommend gradually reducing the reliance on all types of sweeteners by reducing the amount used and slowly get used to less sweet tasting food.

## SAFETY

All natural sweeteners must be approved for use by Food Standards Australia & New Zealand (FSANZ) which means they go through rigorous testing to ensure they are safe.

Some sweeteners have bitter aftertastes, and excess consumption of some, like sorbitol, can cause gastrointestinal issues.

## NATURAL SWEETENERS & JENNY CRAIG

Low kilojoule natural sweeteners are on the Free Foods List and can be used in place of sugar. Those that do contain kilojoules, such as honey, are on the Grains list, however, as they provide little other nutrients and don't help with fullness, they should be chosen less often.

Some food and drinks that contain sweeteners are on the Limited Free Foods list as some of these products still contain some kilojoules. We also want to encourage members to gradually reduce their reliance on these foods, and they may be replacing more nutritious food in the diet.

## HELPING MEMBERS REDUCE RELIANCE

It is important for members to gradually cut down on all types of sweeteners to help reduce the preference for sweet food and drink and instead build healthy food habits in the long term.

- Help them discover the habits surrounding these foods to then find alternatives.
- Eat mindfully and focus on nourishing foods. Rather than filling up with diet food and drinks, choose fruit and veggies and other nutritious foods that are full of vitamins, minerals and fibre.

## KEY MESSAGES

- 1 Natural sweeteners include those that contain kilojoules and those that don't.
- 2 All natural sweeteners used in Australia & NZ must be approved by FSANZ and are safe.
- 3 Low kilojoule natural sweeteners can be used as a first step to help a member reduce their sugar intake.
- 4 On their own they fit into the Free Foods list and some 'diet' products containing them are considered a Limited Free Food.
- 5 If someone is overly reliant on them, aim to gradually cut down and look at the reasons they have a preference for sweet foods to help form new habits