Extension News You Can Use
Reducing Sugar in Home Canned Food

With obesity rates so high, consumers are looking for ways to reduce sugar even in home-canned foods says Janie Burney, a professor and food preservation specialist with the University of Tennessee Extension Department of Family and Consumer Sciences.

"Many consumers like the taste of fresh produce preserved at home, but they want less sugar," Burney said. Here are some tips from the expert about when sugar can be reduced and when the sweetener is necessary for a safe home-preserved product.

**Question:** Can I make my jams and jellies with a sugar substitute?
**Burney:** Yes, you can, but be sure to use a recipe that has the sugar substitute listed with the exact amount to use. You cannot use just any sugar substitute in place of sugar and come out with a jam or jelly that is gelled properly. Changing the amount of sugar or using a substitute can result in syrup rather than jelly.

Sugar is also important in preserving jams and jellies so that microorganisms do not cause spoilage. The high concentration of sugar makes it difficult for organisms associated with spoilage to grow.

**Question:** What is low or no-sugar-needed pectin?
**Burney:** This is specially formulated pectin made for reduced or no-sugar jellied products that can be used in a variety of recipes. Some recipes call for no sugar or low sugar and some use sugar substitutes. Just choose the recipe that suits you and follow it exactly. It is a good idea to follow recipes provided by the manufacturer of the special pectin. Experimentation can lead to a runny product that is likely to spoil.

The first time you try to make a reduced-sugar or no-sugar product, make small amounts. These products may have a more tart or acidic taste because natural flavor changes in the fruit are more noticeable without the sugar to mask them. Light-colored spreads may also darken more quickly with less added sugar.

Make sure you follow a recipe for jam or jelly that can be stored at room temperature if you do not plan to refrigerate the product. Some reduced-sugar spreads have gelatin and must be stored in the refrigerator and used within four weeks to prevent spoilage.
**Question:** Can sugar be reduced in canned fruit?

Burney: Because most fruits are high acid, the sugar is not needed to prevent growth of spoilage organisms and bacteria that cause botulism. Processing canned fruits in a water-bath canner also is important for killing spoilage organisms.

If you want to reduce the sugar in your canned fruit, keep in mind that sugar also is important for maintaining the color, texture and shape of the fruit as it stored over time. You can use very light syrup with 10 percent sugar (3/4 cups sugar in 6-1/2 cups water). If you choose not to use sugar, select fully ripe but firm fruits of the best quality. If you can use the juice made from the fruit being canned, this is best. Or, try blends of unsweetened apple, pineapple and white grape juice. When adding a sugar substitute, it is best to add it when serving.

**Question:** Can I make pickles with less sugar?

Burney: Sugar is an important ingredient for preserving some pickles, typically your quick pickles that are not fermented. Because the vegetables used in pickling are low-acid, it can be dangerous to alter the sugar and salt in pickle recipes because it is possible that bacteria that cause botulism can grow.

Instead of reducing the sugar in a pickle recipe or using a sugar substitute, follow a recipe that is specifically developed with a sugar substitute. The USDA has published two recipes using Splenda®: no-sugar added pickled beets and no-sugar added sweet pickle cucumber slices. These can be downloaded from the following website at http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/usda/GUIDE%206%20Home%20Can.pdf. In addition, the National Center for Home Food preservation has a no-sugar added cantaloupe pickles recipe using Spenda® at http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_06/no-sugar_add_cantaloupe.html.

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