

Pattern of consumption of sweetened foods/ drinks by type 2 diabetic patients of a selected study center

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Sri Lanka is among the countries with a high prevalence of diabetes with one in five adults being either diabetic (DM) or pre-diabetic and there is a rapid incline of this health burden. Excessive sugar consumption may lead to persistent high blood glucose in diabetics due to less glucose clearance owing to their insulin resistance/insensitivity, leading to diabetes related complications. Excess glucose increase fat deposits causing overweight and obesity. Thus control of sugar consumption in diabetics is necessary. A Sri Lankan adult consumes approximately 16 teaspoons of sugar daily (recommended amount 6-9 teaspoons). However, no reported data on sweet drink or food consumption by diabetics is available in our country. The present study aims to observe the consumption of added sugar (to coffee/ tea etc.), sugar from other sweetened food (malted drinks/ soft drinks/ biscuits/ jams and cordials/ chocolates and other sweets) and use of non-caloric sweeteners by type-2 diabetics (n=90) in a selected group of individuals. An interviewer-administered pre-tested and validated questionnaire was used. Amount of sugar in foods were calculated using the data available in food based dietary guidelines of the Health Ministry of Sri Lanka. From the study population (age 35-70 years; mean age 55±9 years; males=40; females=50), 10% had been diagnosed within 1 year while 56% and 34% had been suffering from diabetes for 1-10 years and more than 10 years, respectively. Majority (99%) in the present study consumed normal sweetened foods instead low/non caloric foods. Though urban residents, none of the patients used non-caloric sweeteners. Consumption of high amount of sweets (taken once or more than once/day) was only by 3% while 77% consumed very low amount of sweets (any sweetened food or beverage once or less than once/week). Two thirds of the study population (66%) did not use sugar in tea and only 8% used more than two teaspoons of sugar for tea. The amount of sugar obtained from other foods was approximately less than 2 teaspoons/day for 56% of the population. Sugar intake of the diabetic patients of the present study was in accordance with Sri Lankan clinical practice guidelines (50g/day). The present study revealed that the non-caloric sweeteners were not popular among Sri Lankan diabetics despite the recommendation. Educating the patients of the benefits of use of non-caloric sweeteners to curb instances when they crave for sweets could further reduce the sugar intake as well as improve the quality of life of diabetics.

Key words: non-caloric sweeteners, sweetened foods, sugar consumption, type 2 diabetes