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The Truth About Agave Nectar



Agave nectar is a sweetener with a health halo that's not necessarily justified. It's not that agave nectar is worse for you than sugar, but then again, it's probably no better.

Agave nectar is derived from Agave plants grown in Mexico. There are several processing methods used to obtain the syrupy sweetener. It's not as simple as tapping into the plant and draining it, like maple syrup.

Agave nectar has the same number of calories as sugar, honey and maple syrup: 4 calories per gram. However, agave nectar is one and a half times sweeter than table sugar, which means you can use less to reach the same sweet point. This means slightly less calories for the same level of sweetness as sugar.

The reason agave nectar is sweeter is its makeup: 23 percent water, 55 percent fructose, and 12 percent glucose. The fructose accounts for 82% of the sugar content in agave, compared to just 50% in table sugar. Fructose is sweeter than glucose, hence a sweetener with a higher fructose content will be sweeter.

Agave nectar has a lower glycemic index than table sugar, which makes it popular in some circles of people with diabetes or prediabetes. However, this is slightly misleading: the glycemic index only measures glucose levels, and agave nectar has far less glucose than sugar. Additionally, recent research suggests that fructose may be more harmful than glucose because of the way it is metabolized by the liver.

Bottom line: Agave nectar, like all sweeteners, it is best consumed sparingly.

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