

## Natural Sweeteners

The average American consumes well over 20 teaspoons of added sugar on a daily basis, which adds up to an average of 142 pounds of sugar per person per year!

I've listed them from my most preferred and used, to least preferred and used. This is not a comprehensive list of alternative sweeteners, it's the ones that I work with the most, and are most available.

Not all natural sweeteners are healthy choices. Choose sweeteners that work best for your body and your health goals.

*Nina's note:*

*Glycemic index is the measurement tool that indicates how quickly the sugar enters the blood stream. We want to avoid sugar spikes, because they are followed with sugar dips, also known as the sugar roller coaster. For the most part, we either want to choose sweeteners that are low on the glycemic index or combine a high glycemic index sweetener with a healthy fat and/or protein, which slows down the absorption of sugar into the blood.*

*Also, sugars that are high in fructose are not good choices if you feel "addicted" to sugar. Fructose has an addictive impact on the brain and an excess of fructose will raise fat levels in your blood (triglycerides) as well as contribute to belly fat.*

### Rice Syrup

I use Rice Syrup in much of my baking. Rice Syrup is made from brown rice, which is a complex carbohydrate. This means that the rice syrup converts slowly into sugar in your body, thus avoiding the sugar high/sugar crash that we want to avoid. The process of making brown rice sugar includes cooking brown rice with enzymes, usually barley based. If your family is working with gluten intolerance it's important to look for gluten free rice syrup. Lundberg makes a gluten-free rice syrup. Rice syrup does not contain fructose so is a good choice for those avoiding fructose

### Stevia

Stevia is a plant. In it's natural state, it is cloyingly sweet. In it's liquid state it's also very sweet. I don't love the taste of plain stevia, so I use flavored stevia. I've used vanilla and lemon flavored stevia with great results. Stevia is extraordinarily low on the glycemic index, essentially a zero, which makes it a good choice for those of us who are trying to avoid the sugar roller coaster. Stevia comes in liquid and powder form. The liquid tends to be less processed.

### Dates

You can't get a much more natural and healthy sweetener than dried dates. Soak them in water to plump and soften. Then blend the dates without the soaking water to create a date puree—a versatile sweetener. Even though dates are a whole food containing lots of vitamins and minerals, they do have a very high natural sugar content. It's important to use them in a recipe where there is a healthy fat and/or protein, like nuts, that will lower the impact of all the date sugar on the body.

### Date Sugar

This natural sweetener is made from dehydrated dates and still contains nutrients from the dates. It's a good substitute for when only a granulated sweetener will do. Date sugar is sweeter than white refined sugar, so less is required.

## **Honey**

Bees make this superfood from the nectar of flowers. I love the taste of honey, but I don't always want my sweets to taste of honey, so I vary using honey with other less flavorful sweeteners. When making sweets that don't require heating, be sure to use raw Honey. Raw honey still contains all the live enzymes that make honey the superfood that it is. But just like dates and maple syrup, honey is *not* a low Glycemic food. It's vital to eat honey with a food that mitigates its effect on blood sugar. Nuts are an easy choice because they contain protein and healthy fats, which slow down the release of sugar into the blood stream. Honey also contains fructose, so if you are avoiding fructose, honey is not recommended.

## **Coconut Sugar:**

Coconut Sugar is relatively new on the market. It's a low glycemic sweetener that acts very much like refined sugar in baking. Replace it 1:1 for refined sugar. Coconut Sugar contains more nutrients than refined sugar and is certainly lower on the glycemic index, but it contains fructose.

## **Raw Coconut Nectar**

I use this relatively new sweetener in my "raw" sweets. Raw Coconut Nectar is made from the sap of coconut blossoms. The sap is then evaporated at a low temperature so it retains the richness of nutrients. Coconut Secret is the company that currently has many high quality, minimally processed coconut products.

## **Barley Malt**

I use barley malt for when I want a rich molasses taste in my recipes. It's made of sprouted, roasted barley. Barley contains gluten, so it's not a good choice for those with gluten sensitivities. Barley Malt is on the low to middle range of the glycemic index, and still retains minerals such as: calcium, potassium, magnesium and phosphorus. Barley Malt does not contain fructose.

## **Maple Syrup**

Maple syrup is just that—the syrup from a maple tree. Nothing has been added, and the only processing it goes through is hours of boiling. Even though it's boiled, it still contains trace minerals of zinc and manganese. It falls in the mid range of the glycemic index.

## **Erythritol and Xylitol:**

I tend not to bake or cook with these sugar alcohols but I will buy products that are sweetened with sugar alcohols. Sugar alcohols are formed from the breaking down, fermenting, and filtering of sugar cane or corn starch.. Erythritol and Xylitol don't affect your blood sugar or cause tooth decay. The cons of this sweetener are if consumed in excess they can cause digestive distress.

## **Agave**

Agave is made from a cactus. It's very low on the glycemic index, which means it doesn't raise the sugar level in the blood quickly. However, it has come to light in recent years that agave is processed in a way that produces a syrup very high in isolated fructose (unbound from it's whole food source). The body cannot use high levels of isolated fructose as energy, so it stores the excess sugar as fat in the blood, which causes high triglycerides and excess weight. Use agave sparingly.