

**SUGAR, SUGAR EVERYWHERE: NATURAL ALTERNATIVES
TO SATISFY YOUR SWEET TOOTH
BY MARY JO KURTZ**

What would the holidays be without sweets! They're everywhere. I'm sure that's why November is also Diabetes Awareness Month. Today roughly 1 in every 14 Americans has diabetes and the numbers keep climbing as the obesity epidemic rises. It's no surprise as Americans now consume on average 200 pounds of sugar per person per year.

Contrary to what many believe there are healthier alternatives to refined white sugar and high fructose corn syrup. Here is a list of some of my favorites. I suggest trying some in your holiday items this year for a slightly healthier version with the same taste.

Stevia – This herb grown in South America is many times sweeter than sugar. It has no calories and may have therapeutic effects for people with blood sugar imbalances. It is available in granules, liquid, and powder form. Try adding to beverages to sweeten such as teas and coffee. To replace 1 cup white sugar substitute 1 tsp. stevia; add 1/8 cup liquid; experiment to desired taste.

Agave Nectar – A syrup like sweetener made from the extraction and purification of the juice of the agave cactus. It is low on the glycemic index yet 75% sweeter than sugar. It does not stimulate insulin secretion as other sugars do so it does not create a sugar “rush”. It has a light mild flavor. This can easily be used in baked goods and other recipes. To replace 1 cup white sugar substitute $\frac{3}{4}$ cup agave; reduce liquid by $\frac{1}{3}$; lower oven temp by 25 degrees.

Pure Maple Syrup (Grade B) – Maple syrup is the concentrated extract of the sap of maple trees. It adds a rich, deep flavor to foods and drinks. Look for 100% pure maple syrup, not maple flavored corn syrup. Organic varieties are best. To replace 1 cup white sugar substitute $\frac{3}{4}$ cup syrup; reduce 3 Tbsp. liquid; add $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. baking soda.

Raw Honey – Everyone loves honey, one of the oldest natural sweeteners on the market. Honey will have a different flavor depending on the plant source. Some are very dark and intensely flavored. Wherever possible, choose raw honey, as it is unrefined and contains small amounts of enzymes, minerals, and vitamins. To replace 1 cup white sugar substitute $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup honey; reduce $\frac{1}{4}$ cup liquid; lower oven temp by 25 degrees.