



DEAR

Coffee or tea-drinkers who have diabetes are often told to avoid adding sugar and condensed milk to their favourite beverage, and to cut down on sweet foods in order to control their blood sugar level. Subsequently, they may choose to switch to alternative versions of coffee or tea. Invariably, it would be Kopi C or Teh C kosong. This version of coffee or tea is blended with only evaporated milk and because it contains no sugar, it does not taste sweet. But don't be fooled. Just because it is empty or kosong on sweetness, does not mean it is healthier. Unfortunately, it is pretty high in fat content, especially saturated fats!

In fact, a regular brand of full-cream evaporated milk, which is commonly used at most drink stalls, coffee shops and hawker centres, contains as much fat and saturated fats as condensed milk (total amount of fat 8.7g in 100ml of evaporated milk versus 10.2g in 100g of condensed milk). This is because palm oil, which contains a higher amount of saturated fats, is one of the main ingredients (second highest from the list) in full-cream evaporated milk. Research has shown strong evidence that a high intake of saturated fats will increase LDL-C (bad cholesterol) level, which may predispose one to the risk of cardiovascular disease, especially those with diabetes.

Two tablespoonfuls (30ml) of full-cream evaporated milk contribute 46kcal, 2.2g protein, 2.6g total fat, 1.3g saturated fats (50% of total fat) and 3.5g carbohydrate. When a coffee or tea drinker takes up to five cups of coffee or tea daily with two tablespoonfuls of full-cream evaporated milk in each cup, this will add up to 230kcal (equivalent to the amount of energy used for 60 minutes of brisk walking), 11.0g protein, 13g total fat, 6.5g saturated fats (50% of total fat) and 17.5g carbohydrate daily. Imagine all that extra amount of calories and fats for overweight patients with diabetes! High caffeine intake may also affect the function of the nervous system and heartbeat regularity which may cause palpitations, plus increased urinary loss of calcium which may lead to a higher risk of osteoporosis.

My father who has diabetes loves going down to the kopi tiam (coffee shop) near our home to drink his favourite Kopi C kosong with his buddies. But recently, a friend told me that Kopi C kosong which does not contain sugar and uses only evaporated milk is not a healthier option. Isn't it still supposed to be better than condensed milk which is extremely high in sugar?

DIETITIAN



Photo : Actionwatcher

Therefore, it is advisable for overweight coffee or tea drinkers, who have diabetes and high lipid levels, to limit their Kopi C or Teh C kosong intake to fewer than three cups daily. Kopi C or Teh C kosong is not a healthier substitute for coffee or tea with condensed milk. For people with diabetes, the healthier options would be plain water, mineral water, coffee or tea with artificial sweetener, Chinese plain tea, canned Oolong tea, Japanese green tea. Those who prefer adding milk to their beverages may consider a low-fat version of evaporated milk or low-fat cow's milk. Not only are they healthier, but they also provide calcium for bone health. Low-fat evaporated milk can also be used as a healthier addition to curry dishes instead of coconut milk which contains a higher amount of saturated fats.

The table below shows the difference in nutritional composition between different types of milk used for coffee or tea:

Nutrients per 100g	Regular sweetened condensed milk	Low-fat sweetened condensed milk	Hi-calcium sweetened condensed milk
Energy (kcal)	336	279	323
Total fat (g)	10.2	0.2	8.0
- Saturated fats (g)	NA	0	NA
Protein (g)	3.1	8.9	7.5
Carbohydrate (g)	58.0	60.4	55
Calcium (mg)	NA	324	260
Ingredients	Sugar, milk solids, palm oil, vitamin A, D and B1 and permitted stabiliser	Sucrose, water, skimmed milk, vitamin A, D and B1.	Sugar, skimmed milk, vitamin A, B1 and D3.

Nutrients per 100ml	Full-cream evaporated filled milk	Low fat Hi-calcium evaporated milk	Low fat cow's milk
Energy (kcal)	154	96	50
Total fat (g)	8.7	1.5	1.0
- Saturated fats (g)	4.5	1.0	0.7
Protein (g)	7.2	7.5	5.0
Carbohydrate (g)	11.6	13	5.3
Calcium (mg)	254	279	150
Ingredients	Milk solids, refined palm oil, permitted emulsifier, stabiliser and vitamins	Non-fat milk solids, milk fat, emulsifier and stabiliser, vitamin A and D3.	Milk solids, fresh milk, permitted stabilisers and emulsifiers, milk calcium, vitamin C, permitted flavouring, vitamin E, lactase, flavouring, vitamin E, lactase, nicotinamide, calcium-D-pantothenate, pyridoxine, thiamine, vitamin A, K and D3.

This issue's dietitian is For Wei Chek from National Healthcare Group Polyclinics.

Email your questions addressed to the Editor, Diabetes Singapore, Diabetes Society of Singapore, editor@diabetes.org.sg