

## ALTERNATIVE SUGARS

## Syrup



## Spreading the word about a devastating disease

November is Mouth Cancer Action Month and the Oral Health Foundation is asking dental professionals to show their support and help save lives by raising vital awareness of mouth cancer.

Mouth Cancer Action Month aims to reduce the amount of lives claimed by the disease and make a difference by promoting the importance of early detection and prevention. The campaign hopes to get more mouth cancers diagnosed at an early stage by educating people on the risk factors, signs and symptoms; while also encouraging the public to discuss them with their dental professional.

Like many cancers early detection makes such a vital difference to a person's chance of survival; in terms of mouth cancer early detection can dramatically increase the chances of survival to 90% from 50%.

In 2016, more than 2,000 dental organisations supported Mouth Cancer Action Month through education of patients and local people about this devastating disease, alongside the huge benefits of good oral health for our overall health.

Dr Nigel Carter OBE, CEO of the Oral Health Foundation, said: 'The good news is that we, and you, on the frontline of the profession are in the perfect position to do something about it; by pledging your support you can help raise awareness amongst your patients and in your local community.'

'We remain enormously thankful and humbled by the continued support shown by the dental community for an increasingly important cause.'

To find out how you can get involved in Mouth Cancer Action Month 2017 visit [www.mouthcancer.org](http://www.mouthcancer.org) for inspiration on what you can do to spread awareness.



Elaine Gardner, British Dietetic Association (BDA) Spokesperson, discusses the sugar content in syrup and provides related oral health advice.

**Name:** Syrup

**What is it?** A variety of different sugary liquids such as maple syrup, black treacle (molasses), golden syrup, date syrup and pomegranate molasses can fall under this heading. These are produced as by-products of the sugar industry (black treacle, golden syrup), from natural sources (maple syrup is the sap of the maple tree) or made from fruits (dates, pomegranate juice).

Syrup shots used to produce a wide range of flavoured coffee drinks, teas and smoothies, commonly seen in coffee shops in the UK, are most often sugar (sucrose) syrup with added flavourings, although some sugar-free versions are becoming available.

**Found in?** Available in many shops and health food stores. Some products like maple syrup can be expensive, so cheaper imitations are made out of flavoured high fructose corn syrup (the sweetness commonly used in processed foods and drinks).

The different syrups are used instead of sugar for the different flavours they bring to products like cakes (eg black treacle in gingerbread), biscuits (eg golden syrup in flapjacks) and desserts (eg maple syrup and pancakes). Some products can also be used as a dressing on salad and vegetables, to sweeten stews, to drizzle over yoghurt or porridge, or used in marinades or dips.

**Effect on general health:** Some syrups contain iron (black treacle, date syrup) but as they have a strong taste and concentrated sweetness only small amounts are used. This makes their contribution as a source of iron in the diet very limited.

All syrups contain a mixture of glucose, fructose and sucrose in varying proportions, with golden syrup and treacle containing approximately a third sucrose. As a result, if eaten in excess they have the same problems as sugar, ie obesity, diabetes.

Date syrup contains concentrated date sugar (mainly fructose) with the pulp (fibre content) removed. It has been suggested that it has antibacterial effects (similar to honey), but the evidence to date is from laboratory experiments and there have been no trials in humans.

There are claims regarding the benefits of the fruit/tree based syrups due to their antioxidant content, but these are based on the actual fruits and there is no robust evidence base concerning the benefits of the syrups.

**Oral health impact:** They are all harmful to teeth due to the high levels of fermentable carbohydrates.

**Advice for patients:** Syrups should be used sparingly for flavour. Oral hygiene needs to be maintained.



**BDA** The Association of UK Dietitians

Find out more about the British Dietetic Association at: [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com).

Coming up: *Yacon syrup (nectar)*