

Is Coconut Palm Sugar A Healthy Sugar Substitute?

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Photo by Robyn's Nest

Artificial sweeteners and sugar substitutes can be very appealing to people looking to cut their calories or control blood sugar, and I get a lot of questions about them. Generally I [don't recommend processed or sweetened foods](#) and encourage people to [break free from regular sugar consumption](#), but I recently discovered coconut palm sugar and decided to look into it.

Coconut palm sugar has garnered attention as being a low-carb sugar substitute that is more nutritious than typical granulated sugar. Because of its complex flavor it is also gaining a reputation in foodie communities, with establishments like the popular [Samovar Tea Lounge](#) in San Francisco switching 100% of its sweeteners over to coconut palm sugar.

Pure coconut palm sugar is a natural product made from the nectar of the coconut palm tree. There are several different varieties of palm (Palmyra, date, etc.), and “coconut palm” specifically refers to the *coco nucifera* plant.

Most of the “palm sugar” commonly sold in Asian markets is not pure coconut palm sugar but is blended with other fillers such as white cane sugar. Pure certified organic coconut palm sugar is sold under the brand name [Sweet Tree](#) in the US, and can be found at some natural food stores.

The information in this article applies only to 100% pure coconut palm sugar. Check your labels carefully.

Pure coconut palm sugar reportedly has a naturally low glycemic index (GI)—a measure of how food impacts blood sugar—which has led some people to claim that it is a valuable sugar substitute for people with diabetes or those looking to control blood sugar (the low-carb camp). Indeed, a lower GI may be a good indication that a food is safer for diabetics, though it is not a guarantee.

When I first saw that coconut palm sugar has a low GI I figured it would be composed largely of fructose, similar to the popular sweetener agave nectar (and high-fructose corn syrup). Fructose does not impact blood sugar because it is transported directly to the liver and converted to fat. For an explanation of this mechanism, check out Dr. Lustig's video on the [dangers of fructose](#).

I was surprised to find, however, that coconut palm sugar is [reportedly](#) very low in fructose, and its main sugar component is sucrose (aka table sugar). What confuses me is that the [GI of coconut palm sugar](#) is supposed to be 35, while the [GI of sucrose is 64](#). Something doesn't add up.

I could only find a [summary](#) of how GI was measured and not the published study itself. Also, this information was only available on the website of a company that sells coconut palm sugar. This doesn't mean the number is inaccurate, but it is a little suspicious and I'd like to see the study repeated by another credible source or two before taking it as fact.

(UPDATE: At one time I found reports of [newer tests that found discrepancies](#) with the reported GI of Sweet Tree products, but the page has since been taken down)

The number of [calories in coconut palm sugar](#) is almost identical to the number in [regular table sugar](#) and its closer relative, [brown sugar](#). But coconut palm sugar is notably higher in various [micronutrients](#), probably because it is less processed than industrial sugars.

But does anyone really eat sugar for health benefits?

There are a number of good reasons to consider using coconut palm sugar as a substitute for white or brown sugar in your kitchen. For me the most obvious benefit is that it tastes amazing, similar to brown sugar but with a rich complexity I've never tasted in industrial sugars.

Overall coconut palm sugar is a tastier and possibly healthier substitute for granulated or brown sugar. I wouldn't go so far as to call it a health food, or even low-carb just yet.

Substitute coconut palm sugar for traditional sugar at a 1:1 ratio in normal cooking and baking.

Have you tried coconut palm sugar? What do you think?

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