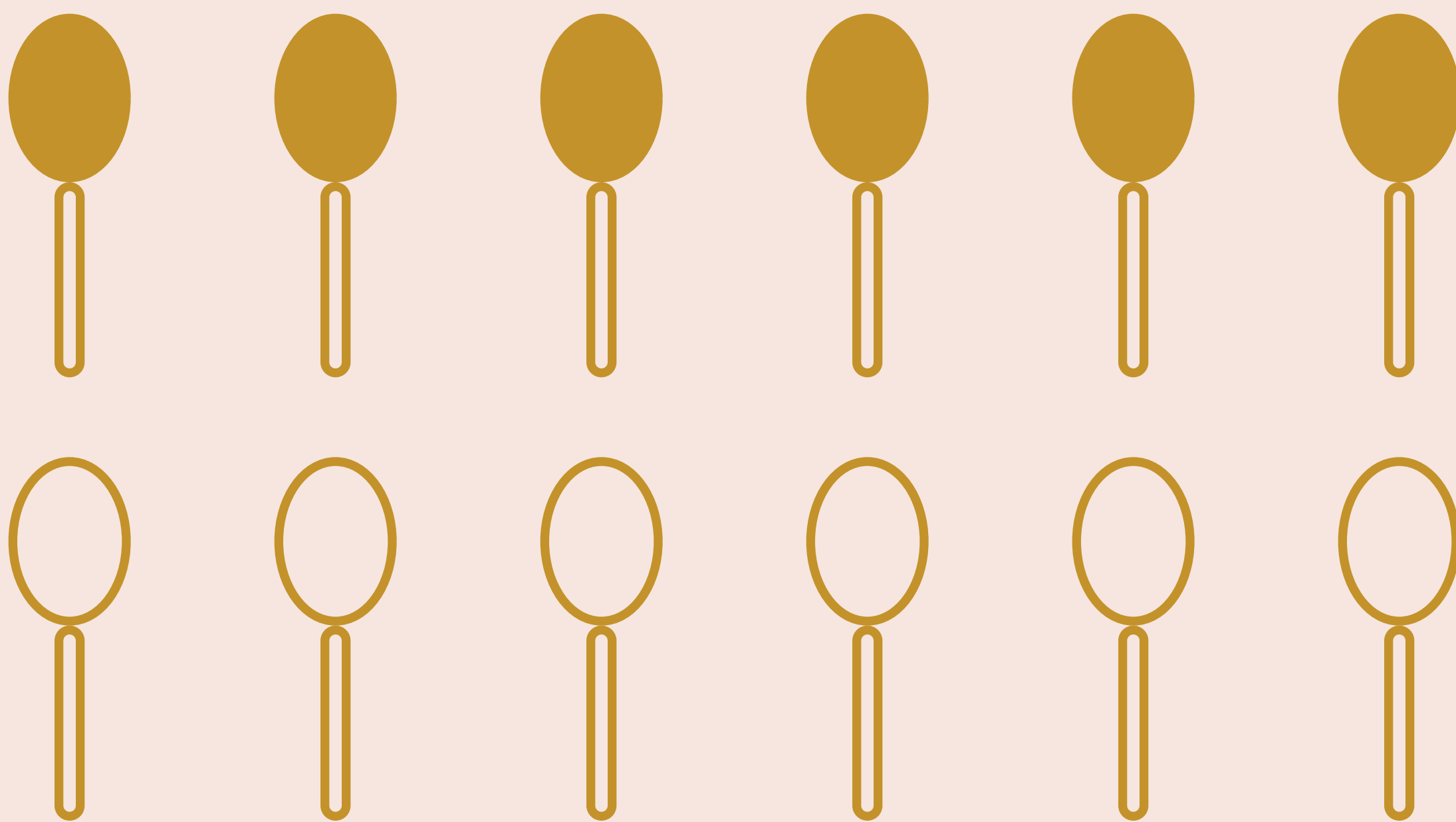


Six teaspoons

That is where the WHO draws the sugar line for a whole day. Not for one cup of chai.



Six is where the WHO says stop. Twelve is the outer edge. Less is always better.

Where the WHO draws the line

The World Health Organization, the WHO, gives one clear rule. Keep sugar under one tenth of the energy you eat in a day.

For an adult who eats about 2,000 calories, that is 50 grams. Twelve level teaspoons.

Then the WHO says something better. Get under 25 grams, six teaspoons, and your body is even better protected.

Your body does not need added sugar at all. These are ceilings, not targets. Below them is better, and none is fine.

Smaller people eat less, so their line is lower. A child is smaller, so a child's line is lower.

Last checked against the WHO guideline on sugars intake, 3 September 2026.

Which sugar counts?

Sugar that was put into food. By a factory. By a cook. By your own hand at the table.

Honey and syrup count. Fruit juice counts too, even the pure kind. Squeezing lets the sugar out of the fruit.

Whole fruit does not count. Plain milk does not count. Plain maize, beans and rice do not count.

Eat the mango.

The sugar you add yourself

In most of Africa the biggest sugar is not on a label. It is in the spoon.

Chai with two spoons is two teaspoons. Four cups is eight. Your day is nearly gone and you have not eaten a thing yet.

Then there is uji with sugar. Mandazi. Sugarcane juice at the bus stop. The tea flask at work, already sweet before you get to it.

So your first sum is your own spoon. Count the cups for one day. Then see how far below the line you can get.

This is not to blame you. It is only to show you the number.

One sum to remember

$$\text{grams} \div 4 = \text{teaspoons}$$

Every label gives you grams. Divide by four and you have spoons, which your hand already understands.

8 grams is 2 teaspoons.

20 grams is 5 teaspoons.

32 grams is 8 teaspoons.

53 grams is 13 teaspoons.

Try it on the page at sweetlies.life. Type the grams, get the spoons.

How to read a label

- Find the word sugars. It sits under carbohydrate.
- Check if it is per 100 grams or for one helping (a serving). Per 100 grams on a 400 gram packet means multiply by four.
- The company chooses the serving size, not you. One bottle can be two servings.
- Sugar hides under other names: glucose, fructose, syrup, invert sugar, malt extract, fruit concentrate. These are all sugar.
- No label? Then there is no number. If it tastes sweet, someone put sugar in it.

One bottle is more than a day

Small soda, 300 ml	about 32 g	8 teaspoons
Big soda, 500 ml	about 53 g	13 teaspoons
Chai, two spoons	8 g	2 teaspoons

One big soda is a whole day of sugar, and a bit more, gone in five minutes. It brings the sugar and nothing your body needs.

Check sweet drinks first. They carry the most sugar and fill you the least.

Check your own bottle. Brands differ.

Why this is not your fault

Sugar is put into food on purpose, at a level that makes you want more. Companies pay good money to find that level.

Then they put it in the bread, the sauce, some yoghurt sold as healthy, and some porridge mixed for babies.

So if your day's sugar is gone by ten in the morning, you did not fail. The food was built to do that.

The answer is to know the number before you buy, and to ask why it is not printed on the packet.

What you can do today

- Count your chai spoons for one day. Just count.
- Check the three things you buy every week. Not everything. Three.
- Show this to one person. The number does more good shared than kept.

Take this. Print it, translate it, teach from it, put it up in your clinic. It is free, and it stays free.

General information, not medical advice. If you live with diabetes, or you are pregnant, your doctor's numbers come first. Share freely under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence (CC BY 4.0). Just say where it came from: Six teaspoons, by Ndirangu Wanjuki, from sweetlies.life, licensed CC BY 4.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0. Sweet Lies™ is a novel about a woman, the sugar company she works for, and what the sugar was doing inside her own family. The story is at sweetlies.life.