

How to stop sugar addiction

We go through the different types of sugar addicts and offer some ideas for how to curb cravings.

By Judd Handler

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We take for granted the idea that sugar is bad for our bodies. And yet, we eat more and more of the stuff. Why? Well, we can't say for sure but there's some evidence to suggest sugar is an addictive substance.

A 2008 study by researchers at Princeton University supported the hypothesis that under certain circumstances, rats can become sugar dependant. The animals in the experiment displayed behaviors similar to those associated with addictive drugs, including binging, craving and opiate-like "withdrawal" marked by signs of anxiety and behavioral depression.

Learning how to stop sugar addiction can help prevent a life-long sentence in which addicts face the dangers of diabetes, obesity and a host of other health ailments.

What type of sugar addict are you?

Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, author of four natural wellness books, including "Beat Sugar Addiction Now," says that beating sugar addiction doesn't take a one-size-fits-all approach.

Teitelbaum lumps sugar addicts into four categories:

1. Chronically exhausted, energy-drink addicts, or as Dr. Teitelbaum calls the beverages, "energy loan-shark drinks."
2. Hungry, irritable sugar addicts who might be likely to tell you, "If I don't eat now, I'm going to kill you."
3. Those with chronic congestion, sinusitis or spastic colons.
4. Women who are perimenopausal (as well as some men who might have deficient levels of hormones like testosterone).

"Sugar cravings exist because food processors dump 150 pounds of sugar per person per year," says Dr. Teitelbaum.

Reaching for sugar because you're tired

The first of Teitelbaum's type of sugar addict seeks a serotonin surge to bypass a rough day. Instead of popping into the local saloon for a quick beer, the sugar addict fantasizes about "[w]alking into a bar, asking for a pint of Ben and Jerry's,

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and having the bartender obligingly slide a pint down the bar," says Teitelbaum.

The problem with this approach: Initially, serotonin will rise, causing a feeling of euphoria, but the insulin resistance will backfire, causing further exhaustion.

The cure, according to Teitelbaum, is fairly simple: "Taking a good multivitamin powder, and adding in a five gram scoop of ribose [Ironically, a sugar, but one that is made naturally by your body], getting enough sleep, getting daily moderate-intensity exercise, and eating 4-5 balanced meals with all-natural food should help defeat sugar cravings."

I'm hungry, I need sugar NOW!

The adrenal glands, which rest on top of your kidneys play a vital role in controlling blood sugar.

Teitelbaum's second type likely suffers from adrenal fatigue. "This person is the 'Feed me now or I will kill you' variety," says Teitelbaum. The adrenals also make the stress hormone, cortisol, helping us to adapt to 'fight or flight' situations. Cortisol speeds up production of blood sugar during stress.

"If the adrenals are exhausted from stress and sugar is the only food that's fueling your system, you're going to see a lot of irritability when hunger arises," says Teitelbaum.

The solution, besides eating balanced meals: Getting enough Vitamin C, licorice (Opt for the root, which helps slow down cortisol production), Vitamin B5 and adrenal gland supplements.

Does sugar make your runny nose worse?

Candida yeast, which primarily colonizes in the digestive tract, feeds on sugar. Teitelbaum says that scientists have yet to isolate what exactly the candida yeast secretes that ends up stimulating sugar cravings.

For those with candida overgrowth or who often have runny noses, or more serious sinusitis and digestive complications like spastic colon or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), Teitelbaum suggests taking probiotics every day, as well as an antifungal natural supplement and, of course, cutting down on sugar.

"When you kill the candida the sugar cravings go away," says Teitelbaum, who adds that only addressing the problem with probiotics and not cutting down on sugar is like saying, "Will a fire hose help put out a fire? Yes — but not if you keep pouring gasoline on the fire."

Chronological clock cravings for sugar

As people age, hormone levels, including sex hormones like estrogen and testosterone may plummet. According to Teitelbaum, depression and anxiety can result from hormonal imbalances. Sugar is often the go-to quick fix for the blues.

A simple solution, especially for peri- or menopausal women: eating a handful of edamame every day to make up for the depleted estrogen levels. Teitelbaum also suggests supplementing with bio-identical hormone replacements when needed.

Some sugar addicts may need dopamine

Karen Paquette, a naturopathic doctor based in Solana Beach, Calif., says that those who have insatiable sugar and food cravings might have an underlying condition with brain chemistry, most notably a lack of dopamine, the feel-good chemical.

"We can get a temporary uplift in dopamine from food so that's why some people indulge in sugar, to make up for the deficit of the dopamine neurotransmitter," says Paquette, who recommends those with sugar addiction receive a neurotransmitter panel test along with a blood test for a genetic marker for enzyme deficiency.

Do you need to go 100 percent sugar-free?

No, says Teitelbaum. "Why bother living to 120 years old if you have to give everything up?" he says. "Indulge a bit in dark chocolate, which I consider a health food."

Eating fruit is also not a concern according to Teitelbaum, but he does strongly urge sugar addicts to abstain from fruit juices.

"They're just as bad as regular soda."



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Got any other ideas how to stop sugar addiction? Let us know in the comments below.

Judd Handler is a health writer in Encinitas, California.