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Sugar Monster

How Sweet It Isn't

KATHLEEN BARNES



"Am I a sugar addict?" There's an easy way to tell.

If you have to ask yourself, you are," advises Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, a renowned integrative physician in Kona, Hawaii, and author of *Beat Sugar Addiction Now!*

The dangers of excessive sugar consumption, especially of highfructose corn syrup (HFCS), are well known. Yet such cheap, corn-based sweeteners account for nearly 56 percent of all sweeteners, especially in beverages.

The average American annually consumes 152 pounds of sugar, compared to 109 pounds in 1950, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A large portion is ingested as sugary liquids, including juices and an average of 46 gallons of soft drinks a year—compared to 11 gallons 50 years ago.

Puts on Pounds

Certainly, high-calorie sugars trigger weight gain, but it may be news that calories from sugar act differently in the body than those from other foods. "Fat doesn't make you fat. Sugar makes you fat," states Dr. John Salerno, director of The Salerno Center for Complementary Medicine, in New York, Tokyo and Sao Paolo, Brazil.

"Eating carbohydrates quickly raises blood sugar (glucose), prompting the release of insulin to transport the glucose not immediately needed for energy, to the cells," Salerno explains in his new book, *The Salerno Solution: An Ounce of Prevention, a Lifetime of Health*. "If there is more glucose than you need, the remainder is stored in the liver and muscles as glycogen, and then converted to fat."

Killing Effect

While the negative effects of excess sugar consumption have been documented for decades, "Evidence is mounting that sugar is the primary cause of obesity, plus many chronic and lethal diseases," says Osteopathic Physician Joseph Mercola, of Hoffman Estates, Illinois, who runs the highly popular natural health website,

Corn Syrup Hides in Processed Foods

Most of us might suspect that highfructose corn syrup (HFCS) lurks in soft drinks, baked goods, candy and other

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Mercola.com, and has authored books that include *The No-Grain Diet* and *Sweet Deception*.

"Excessive fructose consumption leads to insulin resistance that appears to be the root of many, if not most, chronic diseases," says Mercola. Beyond the obvious association with obesity, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, liver and heart disease and Alzheimer's have all been linked to sugar, according to the National Center for Biotechnology Information at the National Institutes of Health.

"Sugar, in excess, is a toxin, unrelated to its calories," says Dr. Robert Lustig, an endocrinologist and professor of clinical pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco. "The dose determines the poison. Like alcohol, a little sugar is fine, but a lot is not. And the food industry has put us way over our limit." Sugar can be addictive, continues Lustig. "It has clear potential for abuse. Like tobacco and alcohol, sugar acts on the brain to encourage subsequent intake."

Risky Substitutes

No-calorie artificial sweeteners can be equally dangerous by convincing us we are bypassing calories. The 5,000-participant San Antonio Heart Study, which followed subjects for seven to eight years, showed that adults consuming regular or diet soft drinks were likely to gain weight, but those that drank the diet versions were more likely to become obese. Participants in Massachusetts' Framingham Heart Study further confirmed that soft drink lovers in general were 40 percent more likely than non soda-drinkers to develop metabolic syndrome, increasing the risk of diabetes and heart disease.

Studies from Washington University School of Medicine, in St. Louis, Missouri; National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; and Gunma University, in Maebashi, Japan, suggest that sucralose (marketed primarily under the brand name Splenda) can trigger the release of insulin as though sugar has been consumed; over time, this contributes to insulin resistance and Type 2 diabetes.

Aspartame and saccharin have also been associated with weight gain and suppressed satiety (fullness) response, effecting overeating and possibly even cancer. Such effects are supported by studies from at least seven countries, published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information. Finally, xylitol, another low-calorie sweetener that some claim to be natural, is actually highly processed and even a small amount can cause diarrhea.

Healthy Sweeteners

► **Stevia**, a powdered extract of a South American plant, is the most popular natural sweetener, delivering no calories or blood sugar swings; 200 to 300 times sweeter than sugar, a little goes a long way. Look for a product with no additives.

► **Sucanat**—minimally processed, dehydrated cane sugar juice—is a reasonably healthy alternative, especially to substitute measure for measure in baking. Because it metabolizes like sugar, it too will cause blood sugar swings; also note that both agave and "raw" sugar, which is merely less refined table sugar, have similar effects.

sweets, but substantial amounts permeate many processed foods. Key culprits include:

- Applesauce
- Bottled steak and barbecue sauces
- Breads
- Breakfast cereals (including low-calorie ones)
- Canned soups
- Catsup
- Canned vegetables
- Cottage cheese
- Flavored yogurt
- Juice drinks
- Salad dressings
- Spaghetti sauce

Notes: HFCS sometimes hides on labels as inulin, glucose-fructose syrup, isoglucose and fruit fructose, among others. Sources include several online publications and food product labels.



Everyday Sugar Addicts

by Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum

A solution to sugar addiction is simply to stop eating sugars, especially any form of corn syrup. Drink more water and take a high-quality multivitamin, plus other supplements as necessary.

Here are the four characteristics of people that tend to obsessively seek sugar.

- Chronically exhausted and looking for an energy boost
- Stressed out and suffering from adrenal exhaustion
- Cravings caused by excessive presence of yeast/candida
- Hormonally related cravings

▶ Honey, while not calorie-free, is high in heart-healthy flavonoids and anti-allergens, and may even help lower cholesterol, according to a study from University Hospital Giessen and Marburg, in Germany.

▶ Maple syrup carries calories, but is also a rich source of polyphenol antiinflammatory antioxidants. A University of Rhode Island, Kingston, study suggests that maple syrup may help manage Type 2 diabetes.

▶ Molasses, while not calorie-free, is a worthy alternative if weight isn't an issue, since it's a good source of minerals, especially iron.

▶ Raw monk fruit (avoid processed Nectresse), a small, sweet melon native to China and Southeast Asia known as *luo han guo*, has traditionally been used in herbal medicine. It is touted as being low in carbs and is 200 to 300 times sweeter than sugar.

▶ Coconut sugar is generating excitement largely because of its low glycemic index (35) and low carbohydrate qualities. This optimum option is a good source of potassium, magnesium, iron, boron, zinc, sulfur and copper.

▶ All fruit contains fructose, but in a natural state—not synthesized as a vegetable product like corn syrup. Fruit also comes loaded with health benefits, so eating it in moderation works, especially fruits and berries that are low on the glycemic index, a measure of carbohydrate effects on blood sugar levels.

Kathleen Barnes has authored many natural health books. Connect at KathleenBarnes.com.

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