



THE TRUTH ABOUT SUGAR



MOTIVATION ASSIST
POSITIVE IDEAS ON WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

After years of fat being health enemy number one, we now know that sugar is the main cause of the obesity and overweight epidemic. As a highly addictive substance, it's causing us a wealth of health problems despite the fact that the body has very little practical use for it. In fact, the evidence is so damning against the sweet stuff that the World Health Organisation has even lowered its recommendations for daily intake. According to them, the average person should consume no more than 50 grams of sugar a day - including the sugars found in dairy, fruits and vegetables. Compare that to a can of Coke (which contains 36 grams of sugar), and it's easy to see just how easy it is to put your diet in the sugar danger zone.

KICK YOUR
SUGAR
ADDICTION



Addiction at its Worst

We now know that sugar - if it is not burnt off quickly as a source of energy - is metabolised in the liver and turned into fat. In terms of our weight, the main problem with sugar is that it causes our body to crave more sugar, by programming our hormones and our brains in an unhelpful way. In fact, when we eat sugar, the hormone leptin (which basically tells our body that we've had enough and to stop eating) is not elevated, meaning we want more.

Of course, the problem with sugar these days is that it's in a shocking number of products on our supermarket shelves including - would you believe - tinned soups, pasta sauces, yoghurts and even some 'healthy' granolas. It comes in so many forms; such as refined sugar, brown sugar, maple syrup, honey, high fructose corn syrup, dextrose, xylose, maltose, juice concentrates and more. Food manufactures have invented many clever ways of adding it to our foods, yet it's not listed as 'sugar' and we're duped into thinking the product is fine.

In terms of its addictive quality, some experts believe that sugar should be considered an addictive substance, and could even be on a par with abusive drugs such as cocaine. "Consuming sugar produces effects similar to that of cocaine, altering mood, possibly through its ability to induce reward and pleasure, leading to the seeking out of sugar," according to cardiovascular research scientist James J DiNicolantonio and cardiologist James H O'Keefe. They cite rodent studies which show that sweetness is preferred even over cocaine, and that mice can experience sugar withdrawal. DiNicolantonio added, "In animals, it is actually more addictive than even cocaine, so sugar is pretty much probably the most consumed addictive substance around the world and it is wreaking havoc on our health."





The Irish and Sugar

Data from a 2015 study by Euromonitor examined how much sugar each country consumes, and the news isn't good for Ireland. According to their research, the Irish are one of the biggest sugar consumers in the world, with the average person downing almost 100 grams of sugar per day. In fact, they are ranked fourth for the highest consumption, coming after the US, Germany and the Netherlands. Much of this is placed on the huge popularity of sugary sports drinks and juices, which may contain even more sugar than a can of Coke.

For this reason, the government this year introduced a tax on sugar-sweetened drinks. The thinking is that higher prices will lead to lower consumption, and not only will people be incentivised to opt for healthier drinks, but the soft drinks industry will reformulate products to reduce the added sugar content and, therefore, the tax.

What's the Health Risk?

Most people associate a fatty diet with heart disease due, most probably, to the big health campaigns during the eighties and even nineties targeting fat as the cause. However, although we know that excessive fat in the diet, particularly trans fat (present in confectionery and a lot of baked goods), could contribute to the build-up of plaque and the narrowing of arteries, you may not know that sugar causes the walls of the arteries to grow faster than normal and to become rigid, putting pressure on the heart and making it more susceptible to circulatory problems. In fact, a study published in 2014 in JAMA Internal Medicine discovered an association between a high sugar diet and a greater risk of dying from heart disease.

With regards to Type 2 diabetes, excessive sugar consumption can reduce insulin sensitivity in the body. One particular type of sugar that has attracted a lot of negative attention is high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) — and for good reason, as multiple studies suggest HFCS can influence diabetes risk. Some research in people who are overweight and obese, for example, suggests regularly consuming drinks sweetened with either fructose, a by-product of HFCS, or glucose can lead to weight gain, and drinks with fructose in particular may reduce insulin sensitivity and spike blood sugar levels. In fact, an article published in November 2012 in the journal Global Public Health found that countries with more access to HFCS tended to have higher rates of Type 2 diabetes.





Other Effects

We all know the damage that sugar can do to our teeth (which is understandably a 'sticking' point for parents worried about their child's consumption of sugary soft drinks). But did you know that sugar can also contribute to the ageing of the skin? And that it may compromise your immune system? Sugar curbs certain bacteria attacking cells from carrying out their function properly, leaving you potentially vulnerable to infection. Sugar can also prevent the absorption of certain nutrients in your body, limiting the efficacy of vitamin rich foods.



How to Go Sugar Free

- 1) Go cold turkey:** cut it out completely for three days. You may suffer common withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches or irritability, but it's the only way. Like any drug, in order to be free from it, you need to cut it out.
- 2) Engage The 'STOP' Button:** particularly for the first 10 days. Being around other people who are consuming sugar can be a huge source of temptation so steer clear for the first ten days. After this, it will get easier. In fact, you may well be surprised how much easier it is than you originally thought.
- 3) Sugar is sugar:** many people make the mistake of replacing sugar with healthier alternatives, but these are still sugar! Things like maple syrup, coconut sugar and honey. Although these products contain certain vitamins and minerals, they still have the same effect on our blood glucose and can be just as addictive, so it's best to steer clear of them for a while, under cravings are under control
- 4) Be wary of hidden sugars:** with sugar lurking in many shop-bought products, it's crucial to be food label savvy. Aim for products that are 5 grams or less of sugar per 100 grams of product (this is low sugar). For medium sugar items, it's anything up to 15 grams. Anything over this is high sugar and should not be consumed if possible.

- 5) Prioritise sleep:** low blood sugar could be the reason for your morning sugar cravings, which is why it's particularly important now to prioritise sleep. Rather than reaching for sugary cereals or even for porridge with honey, opt instead for a protein-based breakfast such as a poached egg on one slice of wholemeal toast and add some avocado and tomatoes/mush-rooms for added fibre and a dose of healthy fats.
- 6) Be wary of dressings:** you might think you're doing great by eating healthy salads, but your salad dressing could be ruining it all. Did you know that some French dressings and vinaigrettes can contain as much as 7 grams of sugar in just one serving, while oil-based dressings claiming to be low fat are often pumped full of sugar to compensate and to enhance the flavour? Use balsamic vinegar instead or a dressing with a tablespoon of good quality olive oil.
- 7) Go back to basics:** the easiest way to cut out sugar is to cook from scratch using good quality protein foods, like fish or meat, and lots of vegetables (for now, limit 'sweet' tasting veg-gies like carrots and peas and, instead, rely on vegetables that don't have a sweet taste such as broccoli, cauliflower, celery and salad veggies like rocket and tomatoes). You don't have to be making elaborate dinners - a simple dinner of grilled fish with veggies is perfect and quick to make.
- 8) Eat little and often:** when going sugar-free, it's crucial to avoid deprivation. Sugar cravings can be a sign that your blood sugar levels are unbalanced. If you want a healthy snack that gives you a lift, try some apple with peanut butter, a handful of nuts or a serving of Greek yoghurt with a handful of blueberries. Protein foods keep you feeling full for longer, which can help avoid sugar cravings.
- 9) Cut out alcohol:** because it's like drinking sugar! Also, it will wreak havoc on your appetite as it increases the 'hunger hormone', ghrelin. Ghrelin stimulates the appetite so higher levels will bring about an increase in appetite and cravings.
- 10) Get moving:** even if it feels like the last thing you want to do, exercise is a good idea. One reason you may be craving sugar is because you're lacking in energy and regular exercise is known to actually boost energy. It can also provide a great distraction from your cravings and encourages you to look after your body and to think twice about what you're putting into it. Also, studies have shown that short bouts of HIIT can actually help you to reduce sugar cravings, due to the impact it has on ghrelin (HIIT lowers levels).
- 11) Choose 'treats' wisely:** opt for treats that are low sugar (5 grams or less) such as the Motivation protein bars.
- 12) Start again:** it's normal to go through periods of being sugar-free, followed by a period when you're back 'on' sugar again. Just start again - cut it out completely and monitor how much better you feel in order to regain the original motivation you once had.

What to Expect

Most people report initial withdrawal symptoms such as:

- Headaches
- Irritability/grumpiness
- Light headedness
- Fatigues
- Feeling 'shaky' or 'spacey'
- An inability to concentrate
- Sleep problems

However, once past the initial three-day period, many report feelings of improved energy; improved sleep; glowing skin; improved mood and reduced cravings and appetite.

Strategies to Help Cravings

- Drink a large glass of water
- Do some deep breathing or meditate [Click here to find out](#)
- Have a piece of fruit (which contains natural sugars)
- Eat a handful of nuts
- Have a Motivation protein bar
- Try 'urge surfing' [Click here to find out](#)
- [A Matter of Changing Tastes](#)

At Motivation, we are continually encouraged by the numbers of people who learn how to quit sugar, and don't look back. And the research backs up this idea, that it is only really a habit, and one that most of us can master.

One 2016 study compared two groups of people who were, initially, given the same amounts of sugar. One of the groups was then put on a low sugar diet, whilst the other group continued on the original diet. Interestingly, the group who reduced their sugar intake reported the same dessert as sweeter than the group who had not reduced their intake. And, as the months went on, they rated it as increasingly sweet. This demonstrates that reducing your intake of sugar changes your sense of taste. Just think of the amount of people who say they 'couldn't live' without sugar in their tea and coffee. But, once they kick the habit, it becomes their new norm and they don't even taste it.

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It's not just *what* you eat, it's *why*