



## **How to teach kids about sugar**

This article is dedicated to all of the kids out there who think the orange juice they drink at breakfast, the cookies they eat after lunch, the candy they trade at school and the Gatorade they chug after practice are no big deal. In other words, all kids across America. And also to their parents who believe the same thing: that daily intake of sugar is harmless and just a function of childhood. This is also for my children, who know from my endless preaching that sugar is not good for them, yet never seem to remember any of the reasons why.

### **What is sugar?**

Sugar is a sweet substance that comes from plants, mostly sugar cane and sugar beets. It is one big carbohydrate called sucrose made up of two smaller carbohydrates called fructose and glucose. Sugar has absolutely no nutritional value – no protein, vitamins, minerals or fiber.

### **Why do I like it so much?**

Sugar has been shown to have an effect similar to an addictive drug, triggering you to want and need more, and making it hard to give up.

Sugar was brought to Europe in the 1100s as a precious drug, known for its “tremendous addictive potential,” and was called “crack” during that time in France, says psychotherapist Julia Ross in her book “Mood Cure.” Quickly removing refined sugar from a diet can cause withdrawal symptoms like those with a drug: fatigue, depression, headaches and achy limbs.

Studies have also shown that overconsumption of sugar can alter your taste buds so you begin craving sweeter and sweeter foods leaving the more natural sweetness of fruits or whole foods less flavorful.

*[Graphic: See who actually owns those organic brands]*

## **What actually happens to my body when I eat sugar?**

When you consume sugar, it enters your blood rapidly because there aren't any nutrients or fiber to slow it down. This causes the sugar or glucose levels in your blood rise. Your body then hustles to process this sugar because it knows you could be in grave danger from too much blood sugar.

To process the sugar, your pancreas releases a hormone called insulin. Insulin allows the glucose to leave your blood and enter your cells, providing a rush of energy. As the cells absorb the glucose from your blood, your blood sugar levels drop.

If you eat a lot of sugar, the insulin works overtime to force the glucose out and your blood sugar down, dropping it too low, which makes the brain react. This reaction causes you to feel tired and grumpy or agitated and anxious, and leaves you craving more sugar.

## **What short-term health effects does it have?**

Sugar provides a burst of energy that might be fun for a minute but usually doesn't last too long. This burst of energy can make you feel hyper and unable to focus. When the insulin does its job and lowers the blood sugar levels, you might be left feeling cranky, irritable and moody, and less able to concentrate and learn. Sugar can even give you a headache or make you feel sick. Sugar has also been shown to suppress our immune system by lowering the ability of our white blood cells to engulf bacteria, which can lead to more colds, flus and other sicknesses.

You will feel far better and have more consistent energy without an overload of sugar in your diet.

## **What long-term effects does it have?**

Eating too much sugar can make you feel full so you don't eat enough healthful foods. Then your body ends up missing important nutrients such as protein, vitamins and minerals.

Refined sugar has been linked to the following diseases and health complications:

- Obesity and Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease and high blood pressure
- Cancer
- Depression
- Allergies
- ADD/ADHD
- Asthma
- Arthritis

## **How does sugar make me fat?**

If you eat more sugar than your body can use in a day, it stores the sugar it doesn't need in the liver or converts it to fat. When you do this regularly, you damage your liver and build up fat.

## **Will a little sugar hurt me?**

No. Make it a sometimes food. (Unless you have diabetes or an issue with your blood sugar in which case see a doctor.) The American Heart Association recommends no more than 3 teaspoons (12 grams) of added sugar per day for kids, yet get according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, the average consumption is 23 teaspoons for boys and 18 for girls. The recommended daily allowance can be easily exceeded with just one bowl of cereal! A child who drinks a 20-ounce original Gatorade will have consumed three times his or her sugar allowance for the day.

“Added sugar” refers to the sugar and high-fructose corn syrup added to foods during processing. The sugar in fruits, vegetables and other whole foods are not added sugars; they are natural sugars.

## **What foods have sugar?**

Added sugar is in 74 percent of packaged foods, according to a study published in 2012 by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Those include foods that many of us think of as healthful: yogurt, energy bars, pasta sauce, breads, salad dressing and ketchup.

The FDA maintains a list of more than 3,000 food additives that are put into our processed foods. Sugar is the second most common

behind salt, which means it is in a lot of the things we eat. Low-fat foods often have extra sugar to help bolster the taste. Brightly colored foods with dyes usually have added sugar. Read your labels.

## **Doesn't fruit have sugar?**

Unless you have diabetes, it is difficult to absorb too much sugar from eating whole fruit because whole fruit has fiber. Fiber slows down the digestive process by releasing sugar into the bloodstream at a slow and steady rate. Unlike whole fruit, fruit juice lacks fiber, quickly releasing sugar into the bloodstream causing a burst of energy followed by a sugar crash. One cup of apple juice has 24 grams of sugar. Some juice has almost as much sugar as soda.

## **Does sugar really cause cavities?**

Yes. Tooth decay begins with bacteria that naturally live in the mouth. These bacteria burn sugar in order to thrive, and during this process convert sugar into acid. The acid then eats away at a tooth's enamel, which causes cavities. Sticky foods like Skittles and Starburst and long-lasting candies such as lollipops and Jolly Ranchers are the worst for teeth because they allow the sugar to dawdle in the mouth for a prolonged period.

## **Now that I know this, what can I do?**

I recommend that parents and their kids (age 10 and older) watch the film "Fed Up" together and join the filmmakers' challenge to give up sugar for 10 days and see how they feel. And if you want to have a sizable impact on your lifelong health, reduce your sugar consumption all year long!

Source: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/how-to-teach-your-kids-about-sugar/2015/05/12/6b8b7882-f401-11e4-b2f3-af5479e6bbdd\\_story.html?postshare=1301434678689764](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/how-to-teach-your-kids-about-sugar/2015/05/12/6b8b7882-f401-11e4-b2f3-af5479e6bbdd_story.html?postshare=1301434678689764)