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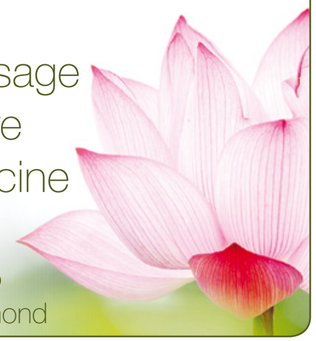

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Natural Health & Wellbeing

SUGAR...

by Fiona Kane
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I heard that sugar is bad, is that true?

Yes, it is! Sugar is the generalised name for carbohydrates. In your body all carbohydrates become glucose (yes, both simple and complex carbohydrates). Besides the enormous amount of sugar in packaged foods, carbohydrates also come in the form of bread, rice, pasta, muffins, cakes, crackers etc. Glucose is used as a fuel in the body but many people eat way more than they need and it ends up being stored as fat and causing havoc in the body.

I am OK, I only have wholemeal/brown bread

Wholemeal or brown breads (complex carbohydrates) and similar products may in some cases be absorbed into the body at different rates but they are not complex in the body, they are glucose.

Why should I be concerned about my sugar intake?

Some health issues related to a high carbohydrate/sugar diet are:

- Obesity.
- Tooth decay.
- Digestive health.
- Hyperactivity and mood changes.
- High blood pressure.
- Type II diabetes.
- Stress.
- Lowered immune system.
- Oxidative stress on the body which leads to aging and serious illness such as cardiovascular disease, dementia and cancer.

Sugar doesn't make you feel full; it actually leaves you craving more sugar, decreasing your body's leptin response, a hormone critical for appetite regulation. It can drive large highs and lows in your blood glucose levels, which is a common cause of "3pm itis".

Did you know that too much sugar and insulin when circulating through your bloodstream act like sandpaper, damaging your blood vessels, arteries and nerves, driving inflammation, interfering with hormone and neurotransmitter balance, all of which lead to rapid degeneration of your brain? Eating too much sugar drives disease such as type 2 diabetes, kidney disease, fatty liver, heart attack, stroke, dementia, impotence and potentially cancer as high blood sugar stimulates tumour growth.

I hear you say "what about everything in moderation"? Did you know that a recent study of about 28,500 people over 15 years published in *Diabetologia* found that all it takes is one can of sugar sweetened soft drink per day to increase your risk of type 2 diabetes by 22%? In my experience, most people would consider one soft drink per day to be moderation. Don't think that diet soft drinks are any better; the chemicals in those can have many side-effects one of which is cravings for more sugar!

I know what you're thinking "but I am healthy, I don't drink soft drink".

Well let's look at some of the added sugar in a "healthy" diet shall we? Start the day with Special K (3/4 cup = 5 1/3 tsp of sugar that is before you add milk or anything else). A glass of no added sugar Berri orange juice (200ml = 4 ½ tsp sugar). Morning tea is a K-time twist bar – very high in carbohydrate at 24g in total – 3 ½ tsp in added sugar.

Afternoon tea a pick me up Dare Iced Coffee Mocha (500ml = 13 tsp sugar), this is the same as the equivalent amount of coke! Otherwise you might go for a "healthy" smoothie, a medium Boost low fat banana smoothie, 450ml at 13 ¼ tsp of sugar - that is more than coke! After dinner, you may have a Dairy Farmers 98% fat free strawberry yoghurt (170g = 6 1/3 tsp sugar). We are now looking at over 30 tsp of sugar and we haven't included your lunch or dinner choices! Get the picture!!!

The World Health Organization recommends limiting sugar to 5% of total calories, about 25 grams/day. Most people have gone past this by breakfast!

Natural Health & Wellbeing

I often get asked about the Glycaemic Index (GI); it is a way of ranking carbohydrate foods according to their effect on blood glucose. Carbohydrate-containing foods are compared with glucose, which is given a GI score of 100. The thinking was that if you eat low GI carbs that would be healthier than high GI carbs, when it was first discovered it looked like it would be a useful tool. After time so many anomalies were found that eventually they added the Glycaemic Load (GL) to improve accuracy but since the calculation was still based on the flawed GI, it made no difference.

For example, the GI/GL is affected by where it is grown, how it is produced, how it is stored, processed and cooked. It also varies depending on the age/sex of the person eating it. Special K has a low GI of 54 in Australia, medium GI of 69 in USA and high GI of 84 in France. Comparing 3 types of wholemeal bread, Hovis in the UK is 59-77, Sainsbury's in the UK is 59-83, in France it varies from 58-112! It even appears that slicing bread can increase the GI by up to 9! As you can see, it is impossible to know the exact GI of the foods you are eating; it is a completely flawed system. Low GI doesn't necessarily mean lower blood glucose, in actual fact the lower GI foods can cause and earlier and bigger release of insulin. (Thanks for Barry Groves who has written extensively about the GI for these figures).

Total carbohydrate is what matters, if you are eating 100g of carb, it is still 100g of carb whether or not it gets into the blood stream quickly or slowly and whether or not it is coming from bread/pasta or the sugar bowl itself!

Be aware of low fat/no fat/diet options

When you take fat out of food, it tastes awful so the food industry compensated by replacing fat with added sugar. Dr Robert Lustig MD (Paediatric Endocrinologist) explains that sugar becomes liver and belly fat, drivers of diabetes and heart disease.

Since we have become obsessed with low fat/high carbohydrate foods we have increased many health problems including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and dementia. Type II diabetes was previously referred to as adult onset diabetes, but now children develop this disease too! We have stopped eating the fats that are essential for good health and started eating enormous amounts of sugar which is detrimental to our health.

We are all individual, not one diet suits all, some people do well eating grains like rice and others don't. Farmers feed their livestock grains (often corn and soy) to fatten them up quickly and ensure lots of fatty deposits for taste - in my opinion this meat is no longer healthy and it gives you a good clue to what grains do in your body! We need to go back to fresh seasonal food in its natural state (full fat) eg. colourful vegies, grass fed meat, fish, quality eggs, nuts and seeds, full fat natural yoghurt, block butter, coconut oil and fresh whole fruit etc.

The Hawkesbury Independent does not recommend the self management of health problems.
All specific medical questions should be presented to your own health care provider,
as with any questions or concerns you may have regarding your individual needs and any medical conditions.
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