

Crush your SUGAR CRAVINGS

ANNA-MARIE CASAS INVESTIGATES HOW THE FOOD AND DRINKS INDUSTRY FUELS OUR LOVE OF THE SWEET STUFF - AND HOW TO BEAT THE ADDICTION

In 1972, British professor John Yudkin published a book titled *Pure, White and Deadly* that was widely met with derision. The physiologist and nutritionist had undertaken his own experiments and, instead of blaming fat, he had discovered that there was a much closer connection between sugar and heart disease. He also found that it raised insulin levels, which linked it directly to type 2 diabetes. However, Yudkin's claims were disregarded by the medical profession and rubbished by the food industry at the time. It would take almost four decades from then for the world to sit up and take notice. Robert Lustig, a pediatric endocrinologist specialising in childhood obesity at the University of California, stumbled upon Yudkin's long-forgotten work and in 2009 posted a ground-breaking

lecture, *Sugar: The Bitter Truth*, based on these findings. It was a YouTube sensation, viewed by millions and credited with triggering the anti-sugar movement we are familiar with today. Yudkin's predictions are now hailed as prophetic; indeed, he has gone down in history as the man who tried to warn us about the dangers of eating too much sugar. So what is it about this sweet crystalline substance - first discovered by western Europeans in the 11th Century and obtained from various plants, particularly sugar cane and sugar beet - that gives us so much pleasure? And why has it become such an unpalatable health threat for us in modern day life? We take a closer look at the high-sugar culprits in our kitchen, on the shop shelves, and some simple ways to make healthier choices, every day.

THE ADDICTION

Quite simply, our brains are wired to crave something sweet and when we consume sugar, it causes our blood glucose levels to spike, making us feel great in the moment and providing an instant burst of energy.

The problem is that it puts us down just as quickly with the ensuing 'crash' leaving us feeling tired, irritable and craving more sugary foods.

It's a vicious circle and one that is proving increasingly difficult to break; moreover, our addiction to sugar is being fuelled by the food and drink industry.

The availability of sugar has been increasing gradually over the last 100 years. However, it is in the last 20 years that the real problems started with the increasing consumption of very palatable foods that are high both in fat and sugar content. It's a potentially lethal combination.

THE HEALTH CONCERN

Kawther Hashem, nutritionist and researcher at the charity Action on Sugar, says, "Sugar not only lacks any nutritional value, but eating too much of it leads to weight gain, raising the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. There is also increasing evidence that sugar in soft drinks is dangerous beyond its calorific value, increasing the risk of fatty liver disease and type 2 diabetes. Sugar is also without doubt a huge factor in dental caries.

"We're all very aware of the sugar we add to foods ourselves, but that accounts for only a fraction of the sugar we eat. It's the hidden added sugars in ready-made foods and drinks which are the real problem.

"Worryingly, 31 per cent of children aged 2



"An important point is tackling the myth that 'natural' sugars like honey and maple syrup are more healthy than refined sugar. Yes, natural sugars have more nutrients than white sugar - which has nothing other than calories - but they are still sugars and eating too much will put you at risk."

We should also be cautious about products that have been packaged to appear healthy.

Dr Ihonor explains, "Clients often swear to me that they eat 'absolutely no sugar', yet close inspection of their diets reveals they regularly eat things like shop-bought salad dressing and sauces for pasta, museli and breakfast biscuits. These are packed with sugar, but you'd never guess it because they don't taste that sweet and carry a 'healthy' label."

"Read nutrition labels more; if sugar is listed as one of the first five ingredients, that food is a high sugar item."

THE GOOD GUYS

So what about other sugars that occur naturally in many foods such as fresh fruit and milk? Should they be on the hit list too? Official guidance is that these are not a problem and that they offer considerable nutritional benefits.

Nutritionist Dr Michelle Braude, founder of The Food Effect, agrees: "I don't believe that it is necessary or beneficial to cut out fresh fruit - or even dried fruit in specified portion sizes - as we're often advised by all the latest fad diets to do. Fresh (and dried) fruits provide a wealth of vitamins, minerals and nutrients, and do not have the addictive properties that refined white sugar has - along with the empty calories it provides!"

But be careful with fruit juices and smoothies which are often a 'go to' for those trying to achieve their '5 a day', as they may not be all they seem to be.

to 15, 58 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men are classed as either overweight or obese, and almost 3.5 million people in the UK have been diagnosed with diabetes (90 per cent of which is type 2), while tooth decay is a leading cause of hospital admissions for children and 31 per cent of adults have tooth decay."

Startling statistics indeed, but is there such a thing as a safe amount of sugar to consume?

THE HIDDEN DANGERS

Current NHS guidelines suggest that adults should consume no more than a total of 90g of sugar in any form - those that are naturally found in foods (such as fruit) as well as added to food and drink. The recommended amount of "free" sugars, those added or found naturally in honey, syrups and unsweetened fruit juices, should not exceed more than 30g in your diet (this is equal to about seven cubes of sugar).

"To put this in context, just one, single can of coke contains 39g of sugar - demonstrating how easy it is for a person to exceed the daily allowance just with a soft drink alone," says nutritional geneticist, Dr Lauretta Ihonor.

EASY QUIT-SUGAR TIPS

Dr Braude suggests the following simple steps:

- **Keep the hunger pangs at bay** - these will make sugar cravings worse. Stick to wholesome, nutrient-dense food and aim to eat three main meals and two snacks per day.
- **Go green** - drinking green tea is scientifically proven way to manage your blood sugar, according to an analysis of 17 studies on green tea published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition
- **Spice it up** - cinnamon has been found to help lower blood sugar. Sprinkle it onto your cereal, porridge, yoghurt or coffee.
- **Opt for natural** - if you need to use a sweetener, try a natural one like Stevia which contains virtually zero calories, no 'nasties' and doesn't spike blood sugar levels

Dr Braude explains more: "Fruit smoothies and juice cause a completely different reaction in the body compared to eating fresh fruit. They can easily contain more sugar than you should consume at once, so if you drink too much of them, you may be fighting off sugar cravings for the rest of the day."

Fruit juice is basically sugared water with all the fibre from the fruit extracted, and little vitamin content remaining, so be aware that these aren't necessarily giving you the nutritional benefits you are hoping they will."



Our Experts



Dr Michelle Braude, is a nutritionist and the founder of nutritional consultancy service, The Food Effect, thefoodeffect.co.uk



Kawther Hashem is a nutritionist and researcher at the charity, Action on Sugar, which is campaigning to highlight the effects of a high sugar diet and bring reduce the sweet stuff in processed foods. Find more at actiononsugar.org



Dr Lauretta Ihonor is a qualified medical doctor, journalist and nutritional geneticist. Find her at drlaurettaihonor.com