

Breaking Our Sugar Addiction

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Annual US consumption of refined sugar reached 20 million tons in 2010. That amounts to 142 lbs of sugar for every man, woman, and child. The average American receives nearly 16% of their daily calories from refined sugar. These are remarkable statistics since as recently as 1500AD refined sugar was considered a very rare and exotic “fine spice”. For most of human history refined sugar didn’t exist. Today’s abundance of refined sugar comes out of corn, cane and beets.

In nature “sweetness” is a signal to our senses that a food is ripe and at its peak of freshness and nutritional value. Modern food scientists have utilized this sensual interpretation to trick our body’s into thinking processed foods are also fresh and nutritionally rich. Processed foods are in fact quite the opposite. Processed foods have been stripped of the nutrients found in fresh foods in order to prevent spoiling. This is done to maximize commercial shelf life. The quantities of sugar added to betray our senses greatly exceed what occurs in fresh foods.

The consequences of all this added sugar are a lot of tooth decay along with skyrocketing obesity in adults and children, diabetes, liver disease, and cardiovascular disease. As naturopathic physicians we are commonly witnessing anxiety, depression, insomnia, heartburn, bowel problems, menstrual problems, hormone imbalance, acne, other skin conditions, chronic inflammation and

fatigue in patients that we can trace back at least in part to excess sugar consumption.

When our taste for sugar becomes a compulsion we can rightfully call it an addiction. There are three main factors in sugar addiction: emotional comfort, distorted bowel ecology and blood sugar swings.

Some people have stronger emotional connections to food than the rest of us. They will seek comfort, pleasure, and even meaning from eating. Unhealthy relationships with food can sometimes be traced back to the use of food as punishment and rewards during childhood. Nutrition is an essential need and shouldn’t be used as a pawn with children.

Inside each of our digestive systems we host a massive ecosystem of microorganisms, primarily bacteria with some yeasts and fungi mixed in. What thrives in us depends largely on what kinds of foods we eat. A diet rich in whole foods with high fiber encourages the growth of good bacteria. These organisms provide us with vitamins and short chain fatty acids that contribute to bowel and general health and leave us satisfied. Sugary diets encourage the growth of bad bacteria, yeasts and fungus. These organisms produce toxins that tax our health and increase our craving for sugar.

When we eat sweetened foods our blood sugar can spike and crash during the day along with our mental energy. Going into reactive



low blood sugar increases our craving for sweetened foods. Once blood sugar starts becoming reactive on a daily basis we have started down the path towards diabetes.

The prescription is to get off sugar. Go on a sugar fast where you consume nothing sweet or sweetened for 2 or more weeks. Divorce yourself from soft drinks. Start reading labels and notice if added sweeteners are in the first 3 listed ingredients – reject those foods now and forever. Cook with fresh whole foods as often as possible. If your sugar cravings persist, seek professional help. The naturopathic

doctors at True Health Medicine, PC have the tools to help you restore a healthy intestinal ecology, to smooth daily blood sugar levels, and to help you prevent from sliding into diabetes and other serious health conditions.



Dr. Jeff Clark is a naturopathic physician with True Health Medicine, PC, a group practice in Tualatin serving the whole family with naturopathic primary care and acupuncture.