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Removing Sugar

FROM YOUR DIET

Gemma Hurditch from CNM
helps you to break your bad relationship with the sweet stuff



Sugar influences many pathways in the body, making it highly desirable to our primitive brain reward systems – while we know consciously that we are better off without it. Millions of years of evolution have wired into us the drive to “get while the getting is good”, so calorie-rich foods, such as fat and sugar, which may have been in short supply to our ancestors, are particularly ‘moreish’ and can be difficult to forgo. Eating these foods triggers a reward system in our brain that congratulates us for doing something that, in evolutionary terms, would have been beneficial – making the most of a scarce food source and escaping famine for another day.

Of course, in the modern West, famine is, for most, unlikely and many of us are battling with the effects of

dietary excess. Sugar and other refined carbohydrates, such as white bread, pasta and baked goods, quickly raise blood sugar levels. This blood sugar hike triggers insulin, the hormone that removes sugar from the blood and delivers it into the cells. The resultant blood sugar drop can trigger cravings for more sugary foods and drinks in an attempt to boost blood glucose levels back to their preferred set point – creating a vicious cycle that, for many, ultimately leads to Type 2 diabetes, one of our major modern-day ailments.

LET'S TALK CANDIDA

Sugar also feeds candida. Candida is a fungus, part of our normal microflora, which can, given the right conditions, morph into a pathogen that disrupts the normal intestinal balance. This may

result in problems such as coated tongue, thrush, GIT upsets and even chronic sinusitis, depending on where the overgrowth is occurring.

Candida overgrowth is a factor in leaky gut syndrome – where intestinal integrity is compromised due to an unhealthy balance of microorganisms causing inflammation and tiny holes in the lining of the gut. These allow unwelcome particles into the bloodstream, triggering immune defences and causing more inflammation. Candida also fights for its own survival, and as it feeds on sugar, it makes the host (us) crave sugar! This makes it especially important to give it up.

Sugar overconsumption is a factor in Type 2 diabetes,





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diseases of inflammation (such as acne, cardiovascular disease and cancer), mood disorders, auto-immune issues, overweight and all of the associated health risks. Eating habits are learned (we eat what our family eats) and also influenced by conditions in the womb. Pregnant rodents fed high sugar diets produce offspring with a hard-wired propensity to overeating and obesity. This research is unlikely to be repeated in humans, but the effects look to be the same. There is also evidence that artificial sweeteners are as damaging as sugar.

THE MEANS TO THE END

So we have established that quitting sugar is good for our health and good for our family. How do we go about it?

A sugar-free diet usually means ditching refined carbohydrates and processed sugars. This is the focus of the advice below. For stricter 'no-sugar' diets, such as ketogenic, carbohydrates including fruit and legumes are avoided. This can be advised for some health conditions and is best undertaken with professional support.

For a general sugar detox, the simplest way is to go for a wholefood-only diet – no refined foods: if we aren't buying things in packages, then we won't come across hidden sugars. We can eat plenty of vegetables, fruit, legumes, wholegrains, nuts and seeds.

This is not for everyone and means a lot of cooking from scratch.

The rule for all pre-packaged carbohydrate foods, such as bread, pasta and noodles is: it is refined unless it states it is wholemeal, wholegrain or brown. Sugar goes by many names: sugar, cane, dextran, anything that ends in 'ose' (glucose, lactose), 'syrops' (like high fructose corn syrup), juice concentrate, molasses, treacle, rapadura. Avoid artificial sweeteners, which can have the same insulin effects as regular sugar and impede healthy metabolism. Artificial sweeteners can also end in 'ose' (like sucralose). Watch out for artificial sweeteners such as acesulfame potassium, aspartame, neotame and saccharin and other artificial sweeteners



that end in 'ol' (alcohol sugars such as xylitol, sorbitol and mannitol). Xylitol is a sweetener popular in some health circles. It has a health profile in regards to dental hygiene, but is toxic to dogs and may be detrimental to the gut microbiome; caution is warranted. Stevia, a plant-based sweetener is also thought to disrupt the microbiome and the safety of regular consumption is not conclusive. So, in short, when quitting sugar, quit the sweeteners.

Depending on the reason for quitting sugar, some people still consume dried fruit or natural syrups (rice, maple etc). Fruit juices (not smoothies) that have

“When quitting sugar, quit the sweeteners”

had their fibre and pulp removed are very sugar-rich. Candida can still utilise these concentrated sugars for growth, so, if that is your problem, it is worth avoiding them, too. For general health and wellness, provided they don't become 'trigger foods' that plunge you back into the sugar craving cycle, dates with almond butter after dinner, or the occasional dessert made with rice syrup (with balancing fats and protein from nuts/seeds), can be a welcome treat.

I find it's best to pick a day and go for it. Starting as you mean to go on gives you a chance to reprogramme your tastebuds, get to know what sugar hides

in, and reap the benefits of a sugar-free diet faster. Weaning off slowly (unless accommodating a whole family) makes for a slower and, in my experience, problematic divorce! You will probably have some days of craving and even feelings of anger, depression and fatigue. Sleep patterns may change and you could feel lightheaded – these symptoms pass as your body gets used to your new way of eating and heals from the effects of excessive sugar.

REPLACING SUGAR

What should you eat instead? For satiety, it is a good idea to load up on fibre and healthy fats – fibrous veg such as broccoli and spinach are great with an added splash of extra-virgin olive oil and toasted pine nuts. If you're having whole fruit like an apple or pear, have walnuts, almonds or tahini spread with it. Always pair your sweet tasting foods and grains with fats and protein. If you are craving something sweet it often means you have not had enough satiating foods. Satiating foods are often higher in protein, so keep pulses, sprouts and raw nuts close to hand.

Don't go hungry. Sugar bingeing is frequently the result of trying to ignore hunger until the body takes over and the quickest way to scratch that itch is a sugar hit. Don't fight nature, support it – whole plant-based eating with plenty of good fats, such as extra-virgin olive oil, raw nuts and seeds, coconut cream and avocado can keep you satisfied and benefiting from sugar-free life. ❤

