

Healthy Outlook Blog

How to Kick the Added Sugar Habit

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By Jane Langille | Posted December 15 2011

[Diet, Food, Good Habits, Healthy Behaviors, Obesity](#)

Is eating too much added sugar putting your health at risk? You are not alone: Americans are consuming an average of 22 teaspoons a day, way above the American Heart Association's recommended limits of 6 teaspoons a day for women and 9 teaspoons a day for men. Teenagers are eating even more: on average they are downing 28 teaspoons of sugar per day!

We know that too much added sugar can sabotage a healthy diet and lead to obesity, higher triglycerides and lower HDL cholesterol, all primary risk factors for heart disease. So why is it so hard to cut back?

We are wired to overeat sugar, fat, and salt – especially in combination.

One study by the National Institutes of Health found that when high-sugar, high-fat and high-salt foods were available in abundant supply, participants consumed an average of 150% of the calories required to maintain a stable weight.

Eating too much sugar drives up insulin levels, which can lead to obesity.

Insulin is a hormone secreted by the pancreas to convert sugar into energy that can be used by cells in the body. When insulin is released, the sugar in your bloodstream is used in one of three ways: as an immediate fuel source for your brain and kidneys; storage as glycogen in the liver or muscles for short-term energy needs; or storage as fat for future energy. Therefore, when too much sugar is consumed, your body will store the unused glucose as fat. "Excess insulin tells your body to store fat and it blocks fat burning while it's elevated," says [Natasha Turner](#), N.D. and author of [The Hormone Diet](#) and [The Supercharged Hormone Diet](#).

Elevated insulin blocks the appetite-suppressing hormone leptin and cranks up your desire to eat more. Leptin is the hormone that produces a feeling of satiety and tells your brain you have eaten enough food. Excess insulin not only blocks leptin, it also causes a spike in dopamine, a hormone associated with reward



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[Getting Older Can Make You Happier!](#)

Wrinkles and gray hair notwithstanding, most people actually get happier as they get older, according to recent research. A study at the university of Warwick backs up earlier research showing that mental and emotional quality of life (QOL) go up after middle age, even as physical QOL goes down.



[Secrets of a Hot Pepper: Capsaicin Patches Help Relieve Pain](#)

Recent research suggests that the chemical so hot in peppers that it can make your eyes tear and your mouth feel scalded can also reduce the pain from postherpetic neuralgia (lingering pain following shingles), sore muscles, backaches, arthritis pain, and sprains and strains.

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pathways in the brain.

Chronic stress promotes consumption of added sugar as a form of self-medication. High-sugar foods can relieve pain or stress, stimulate or calm us down.

So how do you leave the sugar habit behind?

“The best way to kick the sugar habit is to go ‘cold turkey.’ Otherwise, if you eat sugar in small amounts here and there, all it’s going to do is perpetuate your cravings,” says Dr. Turner.

In her clinical practice, she recommends a two-week detoxification diet, cutting out all forms of added sugar while eating healthy foods like lean protein, carbohydrates from fruits and vegetables, adequate dietary fiber, and sufficient healthy fats. She finds that her patients have usually lost their sweet-tooth cravings by the end of the fourth day.

In order to resist backsliding to old habits, Dr. Turner recommends starting your day with a higher-protein breakfast such as eggs, a protein shake, or Greek yogurt and berries, to help prevent carbohydrate cravings in the middle of the afternoon. She also says, “Do not miss your afternoon snack, which should contain some protein, some carbohydrates and some healthy fats so you don’t binge at dinner time. Try 12-15 almonds with a piece of low fat cheese or hummus with veggie sticks.”

David Kessler, M.D., recommends four behaviors to reverse long-standing destructive eating habits in his book, [The end of overeating: Taking control of the Insatiable North American Appetite](#):

1) Awareness. Does the smell of cookies baking make you want to eat them? Learn to recognize what sensory stimuli are creating your cravings for sweet foods so that you can decide whether to act on the urge or not.

2) Remove the temptation. Drive a different route to work to avoid seeing a fast-food outlet or purge your refrigerator and cupboards of sweets and treats so that they are not available.

3) Form new thoughts to compete with the old ones. For example, instead of saying “I’ll just have one bite of that dessert,” say, “I’ll not have any because it will lead to eating too much.”

4) Create a support network. Tell others about your healthy eating plan and you will sustain and reinforce your motivation. GE’s free [My Diet Diary-Calorie Counter iPhone app](#) allows users to track their food, exercise and weight goals and share their progress with friends on Facebook at MedHelp for support and encouragement.

What steps will you take to kick the added sugar habit?

CONNECT THE DOTS

Learn more about healthy eating to lose fat and balance your hormones at [Clear Medicine](#), Natasha Turner’s wellness boutique in Toronto, Ontario. For further information about making good food choices at the grocery store, check out Marion Nestle’s book, [What to Eat: An Aisle by Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating](#), or check out her blog, [Food Politics](#). You may also enjoy reading our earlier Healthy Outlook Blog posts, [“The Hidden Health Risks of Sweet Drinks,”](#) [“Is Too Much Sitting Putting](#)

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