



FAB BITS-N-TIPS – WEEK OF 4 JUNE 2012

Sugar: The New Drug Addiction



When it comes to diet, most of us have already gotten the message loud and clear: Sugar is bad. But not many of us realize just how serious a threat sugar can pose to our health and well-being. Don't worry, the good news is right around the corner... but first, let's take a closer look at this possibly-deadly white powder:

- **It comes in all shapes and sizes.** Here's a quick sugar anatomy lesson: Sucrose, or table sugar, is broken down into glucose and fructose. The primary difference in those two simple sugars is how our bodies metabolize them. Fructose is the real evil-doer here – it can lead to liver problems and other chronic diseases. And, because we're consuming it in such mass quantities, the negative effects are profound. Unless you're living under a sugar-free rock, you've probably heard that high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is bad news. The leading ingredient in many sodas and processed foods, HFCS wreaks havoc on our blood sugar levels, which zaps our energy, causes cravings, and is linked to type 2 diabetes.
- **The term "sugar addict" is no joke.** *New York Times* columnist Mark Bittman says that eating too much sugar has become "the biggest public health challenge facing the developed world." In fact, Americans consume around 18% of our daily calories from added sugar – a pretty hefty number, considering that this white stuff provides no nutritional value and comes with several known negative effects. And, like any addictive drug, it can be insidious. In one study, when rats were given a choice of sugar water or cocaine, 94% chose sugar water. And, rats that were addicted to cocaine quickly switched their preference to sugar.



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Okay, so now for the aforementioned good news: Even if you're hooked on sugary sodas, candy and fructose-laden snacks, you too, can shake the sugar habit. Here's how:

- **Take it one meal at a time.** Whenever I start people on a new eating plan, I ask them to keep a food journal so they can chart their daily eating habits – and what most surprises everyone is how much sugar we're taking in, even when we're not consciously eating "sweets." The trick is to find healthy substitutions. Take breakfast, for example. A seemingly-innocent bowl of cereal with banana slices and a glass of orange juice contains as much as 70 grams of sugar, depending on your portion sizes. Here's an easy switch: Mix your favorite sweet cereal with a low-sugar, high-fiber option like Kashi. Instead of regular milk, try unsweetened almond milk. Swap that banana for fresh blueberries. And instead of orange juice, jazz up a glass of water with a fizzy (and slightly sweet) vitamin C powder. Suddenly you've cut your sugar intake by more than half, and you won't even feel like you're making a sacrifice.
- **Think historically, not calorically.** Start to take stock of your daily snacking habits. Do you tend to binge on sugar at a certain time of day, or in a specific atmosphere? Start to create different patterns for yourself so that you're setting yourself up for success. If you've historically filled up on sweets in front of the TV, make a conscious decision to do something else with that time. (Ten minutes of crunches in front of the tube never hurt anyone!) Or, if the movie theater's concession stand is your downfall, bring your own healthy snacks. Create a popcorn mixture that's low in fat and salt, with a sprinkle of high-protein nuts. Or bring your own bar of dark chocolate so that you can resist the jumbo pack of Milk Duds.
- **Get moving.** Exercise has a positive impact when it comes to processing sugar. In a recent *New York Times* article, Dr. Richard J. Johnson from the University of Colorado, said that working out can "significantly reduce the health risks associated with fructose and other forms of sugar." And, the effects aren't just short-term: A 2005 study at Duke University tested the effects of exercise on patients' blood sugar levels, and found that their ability to process sugar effectively was improved 24%. And, when we can effectively process sugar, that means more effective weight loss, better energy levels, a lower risk of several chronic illnesses, and, in short: a higher quality of life.
- **Get off the roller coaster.** Sugar (and all of its ugly cousins) can wreak havoc on your blood sugar, creating a series of spikes and drops that lead to sluggishness, weight gain, and more. The best way to get off this roller coaster is to re-program your system with the right combination of foods to curb your cravings and balance out blood sugar. That means filling up on protein – which can inhibit sugar's negative effects – and fiber, which slows down digestion and helps your body avoid those undesirable spikes.

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