



The trouble with sugar is, we are eating too much of it! We talk about it, we say we are cutting it out, limiting it, or finding replacements, yet the consumption of sugar in the past 20 years has escalated from 10kg per person per year up to 50kg per person per year. Only recently, medical scientists have finally been able to establish the link between child obesity and fizzy drinks.

New Zealand currently has the highest rate of child obesity in a developed country. Just to give you an idea of sugar content in commonly consumed drinks, coke has 10 teaspoons of sugar per 12oz can, lemonade seven teaspoons of sugar, and sports drinks up to 20 teaspoons of sugar. To get those quantities into perspective, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends no more than 10 teaspoons of sugar a day in the diet. Sugar means the total amount of sugar consumed from ALL sources, not just refined sugar, but sugar from refined wheat flour products (carbohydrates), fruits and vegetables.

It would be easy to suddenly be distracted and focus on these facts, but we have to look at why children are eating so much sugar. We have to look at the fact that children do as adults do (and allow). We are allowing and feeding our children diets that are causing obesity and establishing a dependency on sugar from early in life.

sugar trouble

by Rita Riccola

Sugar is everywhere. It's in fizzy drinks, cakes, biscuits and novelty bars, and also in breads, pastries and chocolate. We add it to coffee, tea and chocolate drinks. We are so in the habit of adding sugar to food, that often it doesn't taste right unless there is a sweet component, even in foods that are not meant to be sweet such as mayonnaise and sauces, even soya milk.

These hidden sugars go under a variety of names and, unless you regularly read about (and avoid) products with added sugar, you are probably eating far more than is good for you. Sugar excess is so common people often accept as normal symptoms such as bloating, acidity, unnatural thirst, unnatural tiredness after eating sugar-rich foods, stomach discomfort, mood swings and hyperactivity. These low-level symptoms can go on for years before a medical condition such as hyperglycaemia and diabetes may develop.

But let's look at sugar and why an excess is dangerous to you (and your children's) health. Refined sugar is produced by multiple chemical processing of the juice of sugar cane. This process involves the removal of all fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals, which is roughly 90 per cent of the whole plant. In addition, it is bleached with gaseous sulphur dioxide and passed through a filter. It is then heated to evaporate off the water content and the remaining concentrate crystallises into sugar. Because of the removal of the naturally occurring nutritional content, refined sugar is described as having empty or naked calories and is deficient of any nutritional value. In fact, it taxes the body's vitamin and mineral reserves through its demands on digestion, detoxification and elimination. Without the naturally occurring vitamins and minerals from the original whole plant, the digestion of refined sugar leads to the formation of toxins. In addition, refined wheat flour, which is also classified as a simple sugar, has a similar effect on digestion. Both refined sugar and

refined wheat flour are what are known as fast or rapid burning sugars. This means they are digested quickly, entering the bloodstream immediately and causing a sudden and sharp rise in blood sugar levels. When the diet is sugar-rich, the body is constantly having to adjust the blood sugar and, as this normally functions within a very small range, it can become unbalanced easily. This is where we experience the symptoms mentioned previously. When the body can no longer accommodate these constant fluctuations, hyperglycaemia develops and, over time, unchecked, can lead to impaired insulin production and function, and eventually type 2 diabetes.

There is a solution to the problem of eating too much sugar, and that is breaking the habitual eating of sugar and the continuous craving for sweet. Ironically, vitamins in their natural state are sweet and it has been said by nutritionists that the sweet craving is the body signalling its lack and need to restore balance of vitamins. This can be tricky as there is so much hidden sugar to watch out for.

Firstly you need to familiarise yourself with sugar content of foods by reading labels (e.g. small pots of sweetened yoghurt have up to four teaspoons of sugar; low-fat cereals are often loaded with sugar) in order to get a true picture of how much sugar you are eating. Then you need to remove these foods from your diet, at least initially while you give your body an opportunity to remove excess sugars from the blood and begin the process of easing the sugar cravings. There are many sugar-free products you can replace with. Remember, it's not about never eating sugar or cakes ever again, it's about breaking the habitual eating of sugar and cutting down the quantity to a safe, manageable amount.

There are sugar replacements – small amounts of fructose, stevia (a herbal sweetener) and xylitol (a beech tree extract). But remember the first step is to break the cycle of sugar craving so that you retrain yourself away from the habitual eating of sugars and carbohydrates.

Humans are, by nature, creatures of habit and it is hard to break habitual eating patterns. There is often a lot invested in our eating behaviours – emotional attachments, comfort eating to distract us from unhappy situations or emotional issues, and family patterns, to name a few. But we have to face the facts. The statistics show us our health is deteriorating, our eating behaviour is a contributing cause, and unless we address these issues we are creating our own worst nightmare – a lifetime of less than optimal health and the subsequent rise in degenerative disease. ✍

Rita Riccola is a Naturopath who has established the Sugar Clinic in Ponsonby, Auckland. Rita treats people who want to break their dependence on sugar. She also has devised a herbal formula that eases sugar cravings and helps normalise blood sugar together with a diet to lower blood sugar and eliminate excess sugar from the diet. The formula is called Sugar Relief and can be ordered from the clinic. Rita also gives talks to the community to help educate people about how to get sugar-free and stay sugar-free. If you would like to contact her to arrange a talk, make an appointment at The Sugar Clinic or order Sugar Relief, ph: (09) 361 3085 or email: thesugarclinic@xtra.co.nz or PO Box 47244, Ponsonby, Auckland, NZ. If you would like to do the 'Sugar Test' go to: www.sugarrelief.com

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