



How Sweet It Is - Or Is It?



Dr. Kate Thomsen and Silky

Our hunter-gatherer ancestors would eat nuts, seeds, mushrooms, eggs, insects, vegetables, game and seafood. Imagine how they must have smiled when they ate a starchy root or tuber like an early carrot, beet or turnip. To find and pick a sweet and moist little fruit might have been even more satisfying. Jump forward 10,000 years or more to my grandfather who once told me that his family always made Christmas special by giving and receiving oranges and other fresh fruits. My own father and his sister would sometimes be rewarded on Fridays when my Besterfar (Danish for grandfather) came home from work with a small candy bar for them to share. And look at us now - literally drowning in sugar! Processed foods often contain large amounts of added sugars. The average American gets 350 - 475 calories worth of "Added Sugar" per day. Get ready for this - that's 22 to 30 teaspoons per day!!! Measure that out and look at the size of the pile. It's frightening. And even worse is to know that you can get that much in 2 or 3 12 oz cans of coke per day (1 can = 10 tsp added sugar).

But I don't drink coke you say. Good. But do you drink other soft drinks, like fruit juices, other sodas, sweetened ice tea or coffee drinks? Soft drinks are the number one source of added sugar in the American diet. In the five

years between 1965 and 1970 there was a 20% increase in added sugar consumption in the average US diet - mostly from beverages. We went from getting 12% of our calories from beverages to 21% in those five years. No wonder we're overweight. These soft drinks have been associated with the development of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, gout, obesity, dental problems and malnutrition. The latter is true because when you feel full from the empty but generous calories in your beverages, you wind up eating less "real food" with its complement of vitamins, minerals and nutrients.

High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) - The Corn Refiners Association has a widespread public relations campaign extolling the versatility and value of HFCS, but even they should admit you can have too much of a good thing. And HFCS is in everything! Soft drinks may give us a whopping dose but start reading labels of packaged foods and you'll be surprised to see how ubiquitous it is. And I don't think HFCS is a good thing. HFCS is 55% fructose and 45% glucose. The liver appears to attract the sugar fructose much more than the other simple sugar, glucose. The liver converts it into fat which can be stored in the liver or released into the blood as triglycerides. Is it coincidence that as we have more and more packaged/processed foods in our diets that we see an epidemic of people with "fatty liver" and high triglycerides/metabolic syndrome/pre-diabetes? Yes there is fructose in table sugar (made of glucose and fructose) and fructose in fruit but it is the large quantities in soft drinks and the pervasiveness of HFCS in so many packaged

foods that makes me think it is a huge public health crisis.

Refined vs Complex Carbohydrates - Sugar is categorized as a carbohydrate. This category also includes fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, starches and sweets. Carbohydrates raise your blood sugar, to give you fuel or energy. Table sugar (sucrose) is a "refined" carbohydrate - coming from a natural source (sugar cane) but processed to remove the fiber, vitamins, minerals and other phytonutrients that were in the original whole food. The refining process makes pasta or bread from grains and juices from whole fruits. Refined carbohydrate as a fuel burn more like twigs than logs. When we run our metabolic fires on twigs we are in danger of burning out all the time - rather than burning steady. By comparison, "complex" carbohydrates (whole fruits and vegetables) have many more nutrients, they break down more slowly providing steady energy and mental function, and they contain fiber which is important for proper gut function and probably lower cholesterol. Whole fruits and vegetables give the correct information to your genes for proper functioning. I can only imagine our poor genes trying to figure out the message from highly refined processed carbohydrates. From the state of health we're in these days, the message appears to be "ouch!"

Typical blood tests contain a 12-hour fasting glucose that only shows your body's response to a recent sugar load. You can also get a blood level of Hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) which shows your average blood sugar over the past 3 months. People without diabetes should be between 4.8 and 5.6. Prediabetes is 5.7-6.3.

What About "Healthy Sugar?"

Honey from the bees, agave from the cactus, and brown rice syrup are all still refined sugars. Their advantage over table sugar (sucrose) is that they have a few more nutrients. They still burn like twigs and so can spike your blood sugar. Too much of that is not a good thing.

What About "Artificial Sweeteners?"

Saccharin and Aspartame have been linked to cancer in some animal studies. Sucralose is made by chlorinating sugar molecules. I don't trust that. Stevia, the herb, has now been processed by a few big manufacturers and will be used in both Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola. It might be safe but huge quantities will soon be consumed. Have we not learned about the effects of too much of a good thing?

What about Sugar in "Real Foods?"

You should eat from the low glycemic index (GI) foods list. These foods support normal blood sugar levels and an optimal insulin response.

Top 10 Low GI Foods (logs) are more complex carbohydrates: Apples, berries and cherries, barley, grapefruit, legumes (lentils, beans, peanuts), nuts (almonds, walnuts, soy nuts), oatmeal (unsweetened), green peas, tomatoes, unsweetened plain yogurt.

Top 10 High GI Foods (twigs) are more refined carbohydrates. These are processed foods: Candy - cookies, juices with added sugar, white potatoes, chips (corn and potato), sugar, most breakfast cereals, sweetened soda, sweet snacks, white bread and bagels (processed flour)

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Diabetes is diagnosed at 6.4 and if you have diabetes, the number should be under 7.0.

It was thought that people with diabetes would have less physical complications if they kept their blood sugar well controlled (HbA1c <7.0). But it appears not to be completely true. Some new studies show that "binging" on sugar creates inflammatory messages in your body that may last 2-3 days. Even if your average blood sugar over the past 3 months

is normal, apparently if you binge from time to time you still have to expect your body to be saying "ouch!"

Dr. Kate Thomsen has a holistic health practice in Pennington, NJ. She is board certified in Family Medicine and in Integrative/Holistic Medicine. For more information visit online at www.drkatethomsen.com. For information about appointments or our upcoming group programs, call the office at 609-818-9700.