Sweetness and Blight

Luscious but lethal, sugar damages immunity and feeds fungal infections

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It suppresses immune function, promotes fungal infections, worsens diarrhea and sucks nutrients out of the body. So nobody would want it, right? Wrong. It's sugar, a major ingredient in the soft drinks, breakfast cereals, ice cream, cakes, pies, cookies, candy bars and pastries most of us love.

And that's love with a capital L. Average North American sugar consumption is estimated to be 128 pounds per person per year-more than a pound every three days. Mmmm, just thinking about it makes you want to head for a hot fudge sundae. But first, you might want to consider the consequences:

Sugar damages immunity. Multiple studies have shown that sugar in the diet has very negative effects on immune system cells. One of the most important ways your white blood cells protect you is by engulfing bacteria or other pathogens and destroying them, a process called phagocytosis that is greatly depressed by sugar.

In one placebo-controlled study, people ate varying quantities of sugar, after which the bacteria-destroying ability of their white blood cells was measured. The white blood cells taken from people who had eaten no sugar could engulf an average of 14 bacteria. Eating six teaspoons of sugar (slightly less than the amount in one soft drink) dropped that to only 10 bacteria per cell. And after 24 teaspoons-about the amount you'd get by adding a piece of cherry pie to that soft drink-each white blood cell could only consume one bacterium.

That is a 92 percent decrease in this critical immune function about consuming an amount of sugar that many people take in several times a day. The greatest effect was found from one to two hours after the sugar was consumed, but the immune suppression continued for up to five hours.

Sugar feeds fungus. It's no wonder many PWAs have experienced negative health consequences from a diet high in sugar. PWA Claude Lavoire of Calgary, Alberta says: "My doctors didn't believe it when I told them, but I developed red, itchy balls every time I went back to eating sugary desserts. After seven to eight go-rounds of these post-chocolate fungal miseries, I sure believed it: Sugar equals fungus."

That also applies to the fungus *Candida*, troublesome to so many PWAs. Ken Luby, ND, a

naturopathic physician in Toronto, Ontario, with a large HIV practice, says: "Dietary sugar is the single greatest contributing factor to all forms of *Candida* infections. Many of my patients have eliminated thrush, esophageal overgrowth, anal itching and, in women, vaginal yeast infections simply by limiting their sugar intake." And Luby emphasizes that they accomplished this without having to use expensive antifungal drugs.

Sugar aggravates diarrhea. This is because it is hydroscopic, or water seeking. In other words, it will pull water from your system. It's difficult enough to keep people with diarrhea well-hydrated. Worsening the situation with sugar is a mistake.

Sugar drains nutrients. Last but not least, sugar and its frequent companion white flour are "empty calorie" foods. They contain very little in the way of vitamins, minerals, fiber or other nutrients vital to health, and they require nutrients to be processed by the body. The end result is a net nutrient *loss* to the body.

In addition to more obviously sugar-loaded sweet foods, significant quantities are found in luncheon meats, pickles, relishes, canned soups and vegetables, mayonnaise-like spreads, salad dressings, ketchup and most commercial breads. And many of the liquid supplemental drinks so highly promoted for weight gain are very high in sugar. So to cut back you have to read food labels carefully.

And don't be tricked by the name game. Whether the manufacturers list the contents as sugar, corn syrup, sucrose, glucose, dextrose, maltose or fructose, they're all concentrated sugars. If several are on the same label, the food is extremely high in sugar.

Unfortunately, such natural sweeteners as honey, maple syrup and brown rice syrup-although richer in micronutrients-contain sugar that can cause the same problems. Although artificial sweeteners might seem a tempting alternative, research has shown that they may create a wide range of other problems, possibly including an increased risk of cancer.

So to satisfy that sweet tooth, you might try to stick to plain fruit or products sweetened with small amounts of concentrated fruit juices. If you can't, realize that any reduction in sugar will be of benefit. And you may be surprised how a low- or no-sugar diet can, over time, greatly reduce your craving for sweets. Lavoie says, "Sure I'm still tempted by a sugar goodie occasionally, but knowing the consequences, I make it the exception and not the rule." Good idea.

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