

THE *family* Sugar *solution*

IS YOUR FAMILY ADDICTED TO SUGAR?



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It's not news that we should all eat less sugar than we do, but what is quite shocking is that our children are eating their body weight in sugar each year.

British children are some of the biggest consumers of sugar in Europe. A study by scientists at Birmingham University found that children are consuming an average of 75g of sugar a day (the equivalent of 19 teaspoons). That's four times their recommended daily allowance. Small wonder that sugar has been singled out as the biggest contributing factor in the national obesity crisis. It's also blamed for a rise of nearly a quarter in the number of children under four having to have one or more of their milk teeth extracted. Sugar creates imbalances in energy that can contribute to erratic behaviour and mood changes, and paves the way towards type 2 diabetes. I'm not telling you this to scare you. Think of it as a wake-up call.

The white stuff is ubiquitous. It goes without saying that you'll find it in sweets, cakes and cookies. However, you'll also find it creeping into practically every type of processed foods (which is why you don't realise you're eating so much) – even some of the least likely. Whoever heard of sugar as an added ingredient to flavoured crisps? In this handy guide, I'll give you the lowdown on where to look to cut added sugar from your diet as well as plenty of inspiration for alternative breakfasts and snacks – often where the sugary products can sneak in.

DON'T MAKE SUGAR RIGHT OR WRONG

Weaning your family off sugar will need planning and careful consideration if you want to avoid a mutiny. Perhaps the most important thing is not actually making reducing sugar a 'thing'. Certainly, don't demonise sugar. Instead, educate your children on how it can make our bodies sick if you eat too much. A simple message in simple terminology will be far more beneficial than banning them from something they don't understand. Trust that if you keep sugar out of their diet that they will be more sensitive to signals telling them they've had enough and praise your kids when they eat healthy food that is "good for our bodies".

Try to avoid treating children with food at all (and especially not sugary foods), instead rewarding them with fun experiences – do a puzzle, take a trip to the park or making something together. This can seem tricky if your child is a fussy eater. It may be tempting to offer them food treats just so they 'eat something' – for example 'If you eat your vegetables, you can have a biscuit'. But this can make your child more interested in treats than healthy food.

Of course, you have to decide on your house rules, but this sends the message that eating healthy food is a chore.



SPOT WHERE THE SUGAR IS CREEPING IN

FIZZY DRINKS, SQUASH, FRUIT DRINKS: 24.8%

FRUIT JUICE/SMOOTHIES: 15.4%

CAKES, BUNS, SPONGE PUDDINGS: 8.1%

YOGHURT, FROMAGE FRAIS: 6.9%

SWEETS, TOFFEES, MINTS: 5.1%

CHOCOLATE BARS: 4.8%

CHOCOLATE BISCUITS: 3.2%

JELLY, ICE LOLLIES: 3.2%

ICE CREAM, FROZEN DESSERT: 3.1%

SWEET SPREAD, JAM, HONEY: 3.1%

SUGAR COATED CEREAL: 2.7%

OTHER BISCUIT: 2.6%

CEREAL BAR, MUESLI BAR, FLAPJACK: 2.1%

OTHER FOODS, EACH LESS THAN 2%: 12.3%

DITCH SUGARY CEREALS

According to Public Health England, children often consume half their maximum daily sugar allowance at breakfast. When children start the day with a bowl of cereal, in pretty much every case, they're starting with a bowl of sugar. Even those cereals we supposed should be 'good for you' featuring bran and fibre are full of sugar. Breakfast cereals commonly aimed at children have the equivalent sugar content of two and a half chocolate biscuits.



CEREALS HIGHEST IN SUGAR

FROSTIES/ FROSTED FLAKES

CRUNCHY NUT CORNFLAKES (also store own brand versions)

COCO POPS/ CHOCOLATE RICE

* AND THE 30G SERVING IS A MYTH, TOO.
EVEN CHILDREN WOULD EAT MORE.

AND SOME YOU THOUGHT WERE HEALTHY

MUESLI

CHEERIOS/ HOOPS

ALL-BRAN/ BRAN FLAKES - TYPE CEREAL

MOST GRANOLAS

SPECIAL K / LOOKALIKE PRODUCTS

SHREDDIES-LIKE CEREAL

A close-up photograph of a bowl of overnight oats. The oats are topped with several cashews, slices of kiwi, two slices of orange, and a single star anise. The bowl is white with a subtle vertical ribbed pattern.

EASY BREAKFAST SWAPS

BOILED EGG WITH GLUTEN-FREE TOAST SOLDIERS

SCRAMBLED OR POACHED EGG ON GLUTEN-FREE TOAST

GLUTEN-FREE TOAST & UNSWEETENED NUT BUTTER

OVERNIGHT OATS

PORRIDGE WITH BERRIES OR STEWED APPLE, TOPPED WITH
NUTS & SEEDS

GREEK YOGHURT AND BERRIES

BANANA PANCAKES

OMELETTES OR MUFFIN FRITTATA

PROTEIN SMOOTHIE

CHIA PUDDING



DOUBLE CHECK FOOD LABELS

Sugar free” or “no added sugar” often doesn’t mean it has no sugar, but maybe the sugar is disguised as something else. This is code for ‘we found another way to make it sweet’ and you’re not going to like this much either.

Concentrated fruit juice of any kind is often used in snacks for toddlers, and it’s concentrated to such an extent that all that remains is the sugar. In fact, sugar has over 50 different aliases. Sneaky, right? Here are just a few: sucrose, fructose, glucose, dextrose, galactose, lactose, maltose, invert sugar, raw sugar, confectioner’s sugar, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, isoglucose, brown rice syrup, barley malt (plus it contains gluten, so double trouble) and malodextrin. Even those supposed healthy alternatives agave nectar, coconut sugar and honey are nothing more than sugar in a nice dress. In fact, they might be even worse for you than sugar, containing high levels of fructose, which places additional strain on the liver.

WATCH THE JUICES AND SMOOTHIES

It's easy to think that these are healthy options, but one glass of orange juice can contain the equivalent of 5 teaspoons of sugar and none of the fibre to slow its progress into your bloodstream. Fruit laden smoothies do just the same.

SIMPLE SNACKS

- CUT UP APPLE OR PEAR WITH ALMOND BUTTER
- OATCAKES WITH SMOKED SALMON OR MACKEREL PATE.
- SMALL POT OF NATURAL YOGHURT WITH PUREED FRUIT (BERRIES, APPLE, PEAR, PLUM)
- HARD-BOILED EGG AND A COUPLE OF CHERRY TOMATOES
- CARROT STICKS, RED PEPPER STRIPS, CELERY, CUCUMBER WITH HUMMUS
- A HANDFUL OF MIXED NUTS AND SEEDS
- CHEESY FLAPJACKS



The background of the entire page is a top-down view of several star-shaped cookies. Each cookie is made of a light-colored, textured dough. One half of each star is coated in a smooth, dark chocolate, and the other half remains plain. The chocolate-coated areas are decorated with a generous sprinkling of small, round, multi-colored sugar sprinkles in shades of red, green, yellow, and white. The cookies are scattered across a plain white surface.

SUGAR ADDICTION IS REAL

Sugar triggers the brain's pleasure and reward centres – areas in the emotional centres of the brain responsible for the release of the “feel good” neurotransmitter called dopamine. The same brain areas are stimulated by cocaine, nicotine, opiates like heroin and morphine and alcohol. In fact, in 2018, a study at Connecticut College found that Oreo cookies were just as addictive as cocaine for lab rats. (I wonder whether the rats eat the filling first, too?)

If you're used to eating a lot of sugar (said without judgement), you might find the first few days of going sugar free tough – but don't let that be what stops you trying. It's not uncommon to experience low levels of energy, low mood or to feel shaky. Persevere. It will be worth it.

SAY NO TO ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

One of the things I am questioned about most as a nutritional therapist and health coach is sugar substitutes. Artificial sweeteners are manmade products that are no better for us than real sugar. And some – notably aspartame and acesulfame-K – have been linked to cancer. Sugar alcohols like sorbitol are poorly broken down by the body, which just ends up feeding the bad bacteria in the large intestine.

And, what you may not know is that artificial sweeteners – and many other ‘natural sweeteners’ that find their way into so-called healthy food – behave in the body the same way as actual sugar by raising your blood sugar levels.

The very best scenario of all is that you wean yourself off sweeteners of any kind as this helps you appreciate and embrace the natural sweetness from real food. If you continue to eat sweet things, your taste buds will always want sweet things. It’s as simple as that. If you need a sugar fix, find it in real, natural foods. It’s also worth considering phasing out not only sugary foods but checking the labels on convenience foods to see where sugar has been added. If your diet has traditionally been quite high in the white stuff, the first few weeks can be a little tricky as your body (and brain and taste buds) starts to adjust – but bear with it.





TRY NATURAL SWEETENERS INSTEAD

Although the ideal scenario would be to wean yourselves off sweet things generally, this can be tough going – at least at first. Natural sweeteners like apple sauce, dates or mashed banana can be helpful. You'll find these in lots of healthy recipes. They're natural, what's not to like? The riper the banana, the sweeter the taste. And what about salt. Weird, right? Adding a pinch of salt (preferably sea salt or pink Himalayan salt crystals) can bring out the natural sweetness in your food so you may find you don't need the sugar anyway.

DON'T KEEP SUGAR IN THE HOUSE. AVOID TALKING ABOUT IT TOO. THE MORE THAT THE SUGAR FREE EXPERIENCE IS NORMALISED, THE MORE KIDS WILL SLIP INTO LINE.

P.S. DON'T WORRY ABOUT PARTIES

At parties you are not the one in control of the situation. And you likely also don't want to be 'that' parent; the killjoy who won't even let their child have as much as one sweet. This is the time when you'll need to relax your rules, both for your own sanity and also for your child to feel part of the party process. So let them do their thing. Hopefully, two things will happen: one, practices at home will mean your kids will be more focused on playing games than hovering around the sticky treats. Two, after a few mouthfuls of hideous orange fizzy drink they realise they'd really rather have some water instead.



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