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Excessive sugar intake worsens some conditions

TALK TO THE MIRROR

FLORINE MARK

Ahh...sugar. We all love it, but it doesn't necessarily love us back.

Believe it or not, the average intake of sugar in the American diet is 41 teaspoons daily! Hard to fathom? Well, it's true. Sugar comes in *many forms and* is an ingredient in boxed, canned and bottled products that we eat every day.

Aside from the more obvious places we get sugar in our diet, sugar is abundant in many other foods. Cakes, cookies and ice cream are usually loaded with it, as are yogurt, fruit, jelly, tomato sauce, cereals, soft drinks, frozen meals and even some vegetables.

We crave sugar and we eat it, but none of us needs to eat sugar directly because the body can break down other foods to form glucose, which is the only type of sugar our bodies do need. In fact, sugar just fills us with empty calories and contains no valuable nutrients.

For many of us, excessive sugar intake is a concern because it can contribute to weight gain and obesity. But for others, the concern about sugar goes beyond the weight issue. People who are hypoglycemic (low blood sugar) need to be very careful about how much, when, and in what form they eat sugar.

The low blood sugar level in hypoglycemics creates symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, dizziness, lack of ability to concentrate and other unusual neurological symptoms. If you eat something and these symptoms disappear, this could be a sign of hypoglycemia. But you should always check with your doctor to know for sure.

A proper diet is the most important factor in treating hypoglycemia, and although having low blood sugar may sound like you should eat more sugar to make up the difference, the opposite is in fact true. Actually, people with hypoglycemia should avoid sugar because it causes a roller coaster effect. The blood sugar rises dramatically then quickly drops off, making the blood sugar go too low.

According to doctors, the goal of treatment is to delay the absorption of food. This can be accomplished through changes in eating habits. Many of the guidelines below can be beneficial to people with low blood sugar as well as those who are trying to lose weight:

- Eat a balanced diet to prevent sugar cravings.
- Avoid foods high in simple carbohydrates such as jams, jellies, table sugar, honey, syrup, pies, candy, cakes, cookies, pastries and soda pop. many soft drinks have seven teaspoons of sugar per bottle!
- Eat foods high in complex carbohydrates (starches). Because they are absorbed more slowly than simple carbohydrates, they do not cause rapid changes in blood sugar levels. Examples include breads, cereals, pasta, rice, vegetables and legumes.
- Increase your intake of fiber.
- Eat fresh fruit rather than drinking juice.
- Avoid caffeine because it often produces the roller coaster effect.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages.
- Lose any excess weight. It interferes with the body's ability to use insulin, which affects blood sugar levels.
- Decrease fat intake. If you are at your goal weight, replace fat calories with calories from complex carbohydrates.

Sugars come from many different sources and have many different names. Look for ingredients with the suffix "ose" as your clue. An ingredient label may list sugar in its pure form (dextrose, sucrose or lactose) or the sugar source (corn sweetener comes from corn, etc.) Other names for sugar are glucose, fructose and turbinado.

There's no weight loss benefit to eating one sugar instead of another. All forms of sugar provide four calories per gram. The advantage of opting for a fruit source of sugar is that it also contains vitamins, minerals and fiber.

Whether you're trying to lose weight or you need to watch the sugar in your diet for medical reasons, it's a good idea to read labels carefully and keep consumption of sugar to a minimum.

I read every one of your letters and I love your comments! Please keep writing me with any questions, inspirational stories or suggestions for upcoming articles to: "Talk to the Mirror," Weight Watchers Corporate Communications, P.O. Box 9072, Farmington Hills, MI 48334-2974. For more information on Weight Watchers, call 1-888-3FLORINE.

(Florine Mark is an appointee

It's never too late to start sensible workout program

EXERCISING OPTIONS

MYRNA PARTRICH

Question: I'm a 61-year-old woman who would like to start working out regularly. Everyone I know swears that it will keep me feeling younger and healthier. I'm hoping that it isn't too late to start some kind of exercise program, although hereditary health problems are a possibility in my case. What do you suggest and how often? At this point, I figure I have nothing to lose!

Answer: Provided you have the OK from your doctor, I think it's never too late to start a sensible workout program. As a matter of fact, the list of benefits derived from exercising is growing all the time. Not only does it help to maintain normal weight, protect against diabetes, increase the levels of HDL (the "good" cholesterol) and enhance the muscle strength and balance, exercise can also ward off depression and anxiety, help to prevent osteoporosis and reduce the the risk of certain cancers! How's that for incentive!

Furthermore, research suggests that much of the decline once attributed to aging is actually due to long-term inactivity according to the Harvard Heart Letter. Another study involved 101 men and women, who fell between the ages of 60 and 83, and aerobic exercise. After these individuals performed aerobics regularly over a four-month period, their heart-and lung-function improved by 10-15 percent. It has been shown that people who lead an active and vigorous life – whatever the activity – also have a lower risk of death due to heart disease.

I'm sure you're wondering how much and what types of exercise are the best for what might be considered an "older" person. As people age, most experts agree that people need to be involved in a comprehensive exercise program that includes both resistance training and aerobic exercise.

So, let's take this one step at a time.

Resistance, or strength/weight training, strengthens ligaments, tendons and muscles and also promotes flexibility with the use of free weights or other exercise machines. Aerobic, or endurance, exercise includes running, walking, dancing and swimming and leads to improved muscle tone and cardiovascular fitness.

After an examination from your physician has ruled out cardiovascular disease and other potential health risks, you should be ready to begin your exercise program.

First of all, remember to pace yourself. Some people may be ready to really "go for it" while others may need to start at a slower pace. Don't try to do too much in the very beginning because you'll only hurt yourself and probably get discouraged with the whole idea. So, remember, moderation is the key.

For an aerobic workout, here are some quick tips to help you get started:

1. Wait at least two hours after eating, or the body may not be able to supply enough blood for digestion and muscle activity. You may end up suffering nausea, dizziness or cramps.

2. Walk, don't run, when beginning a workout program. Start with 15 minutes at least three times a week, building to every day if possible. Begin with a five-minute warm-up, a five-minute brisk walk and then a five-minute cool-down period. Each week you can increase your time until you're walking 30-60 minutes at a time!

3. Try the stairs. You can climb two to three flights of stairs, rest for three to five minutes, and repeat two more times for a good workout.

4. Other options include treadmills, stair-steppers, rowing machines, ski machines or stationary bikes. You'll probably stick with an exercise you enjoy doing.

Resistance training was once thought by cardiologists to raise blood pressure and cause heart abnormalities. However, several studies over the past decade have shown this type of exercise to be quite beneficial for people with cardiac problems, as well as for those who are healthy.

So, start with:

1. An effective weight-training program that includes 8-10 exercises to train various muscle groups of the body. Do this type of exercise at least twice a week with at least one day's rest between workouts.

2. Start with a light weight until that weight or the amount of repetition can be increased comfortably. You should do those reps 10-15 times until the muscles are somewhat fatigued. And remember to breathe with each rep. Proper breathing reduces the chance of temporary increases in blood pressure and that allows for more reps. Remember...lift, exhale, return, inhale.

3. Get help! Ask your doctor for the name of a trained fitness specialist who can design a regimen especially for you.

It's never too late to start taking care of yourself. You'll not only be happier, relaxed and well-rested but feel better and look better, too.

What have you got to lose? Absolutely nothing.

(Myrna Partrich is co-owner of the Workout Co. in Bloomfield Hills. She is an appointee to the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and the Michigan Fitness Founda-

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