

THE PROACTIVE

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Are You Sugar Savvy?

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Kicking the Sugar Habit

How to tame your sweet tooth

We know that consuming sugar messes with nearly everything in the body. Getting sugar consumption under control can feel overwhelming, and half the time we don't even realize we're eating it. So how do you tame your sweet tooth?

Step 1: Find Out Where Sugar is Lurking

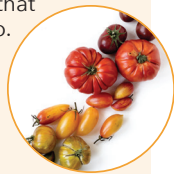
You know you're getting the sweet stuff from cookies and ice cream, but added sugar lurks pretty much everywhere—breads, cereals, jarred tomato sauces, salsas, bottled salad dressings, nut butters, etc. Once you become aware of where the added sweetness is coming from, you can start strategizing.

Step 2: Find Balance

While it's smart to choose low-sugar varieties if it's something you eat every day, your favorite sugary foods don't have to be permanently off limits. Go ahead and add the 12-grams-of-sugar-per-serving barbecue sauce to your chicken, but try to balance out the rest of your choices for the day.

Step 3: Begin to Reset Your Palate

Start by selecting whole foods with naturally sweet flavors; instead of brown sugar, stir warm fruit into your oatmeal or yogurt, and add sweet vegetables (caramelized onions, roasted red peppers, or sun-dried tomatoes) to salads and sandwiches that typically get a cup of ketchup. Unlike added sweeteners, these foods deliver naturally occurring sugars along with fiber and other nutrients.



Step 4: Start Slow

Give your brain and taste buds time to adjust by trimming your sugar intake a little bit each week until you reach your new goal.

Step 5: Crush the Cravings

Eat meals and snacks with protein, fiber, and healthy fats. These nutrients are digested more slowly than sugar or refined carbs, so your blood sugar rises and falls at a slower, steadier rate.

Step 6: Don't Sweat the Sugar Slipups

It can take weeks—or even months—to form a new habit. If you had too much today, start again tomorrow. You don't need to be perfect.



Are you sugar savvy?

■ Sugar is the generic name for sweet-tasting, soluble carbohydrates, many of which are used in food. Carbohydrates, along with fat and protein, are macronutrients that provide the body with energy. Carbohydrates are found in all plant and dairy foods and beverages that provide your body with calories.

Added sugars, of one kind or another, are almost everywhere in the modern diet. They're in sandwich bread, chicken stock, pickles, salad dressing, crackers, yogurt, and cereal, as well as in the obvious foods and drinks, like soda and desserts.

The biggest problem with added sweeteners is that they make it easy to overeat. They're tasty and highly caloric, but they often don't make you feel full. Instead, they can trick you into wanting even more food. Americans average about 20 teaspoons of added sugars per day, compared to the recommended 6 teaspoons for women and 9 teaspoons for men.



Sugar can negatively affect your body in many ways. *Here's a closer look at how sugar can affect your health, from head to toe:*

Your Brain

Eating sugar gives your brain a huge surge of the feel-good chemical called dopamine. Your brain will start to need more and more sugar to get that same feeling of pleasure.

Your Teeth

Bacteria that cause cavities love to eat sugar lingering in your mouth.

Your Joints

Eating sweets has been shown to worsen joint pain because of the inflammation they cause in the body.

Your Skin

Another side effect of inflammation: it may make your skin age faster. Sugar attaches to proteins in your bloodstream and creates harmful molecules that have been shown to damage collagen and elastin in your skin.

Your Liver

An abundance of added sugar may cause your liver to become resistant to insulin, an important hormone that helps turn sugar in your bloodstream into energy. This means your body isn't able to control your blood sugar levels as well, which can lead to type 2 diabetes.

Your Heart

When you eat excess sugar, the extra insulin in your bloodstream can cause changes in your arteries, which adds stress to your heart and damages it over time. This can lead to heart disease, high blood pressure, heart attacks, and strokes.

Your Pancreas

When you eat, your pancreas pumps out insulin. If you eat way too much sugar and your body stops responding properly to insulin, your pancreas starts pumping out even more insulin. Eventually, your overworked pancreas will break down and your blood sugar levels will rise, setting you up for type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Your Kidneys

If you have diabetes, too much sugar can lead to kidney damage. The kidneys play an important role in filtering your blood sugar. Once blood sugar levels reach a certain amount, the kidneys start to let excess sugar into your urine. If left uncontrolled, diabetes can damage the kidneys, which prevents them from doing their job in filtering out waste in your blood. This can lead to kidney failure.