

CMMHC WELLNESS BULLETIN

January 2019

With the holidays behind us, it's worth taking a look at how sugar can affect our physical and emotional wellbeing, and hopefully serve as a reminder for next year to cut back on the sweets!

Your Anxiety Loves Sugar.



<https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/how-sugar-harms-mental-health>

Is it time to ditch sugar?

It's no secret that sugar can wreak havoc on your body if you're indulging in a little too much of the sweet stuff. Still, 75 percent of Americans are eating too much of it.

The harmful effects it can have on your physical health are well-studied, which is why we talk so much about reducing sugar to lose weight and lower the risk of disease.

While ditching the sweet stuff can result in a physically healthier you, it's the impact sugar has on our mental health that's worth taking a second look at.

1. Sugar leads to highs and lows

If your idea of coping with stress involves a pint of Ben and Jerry's, there's a good chance you know exactly what a sugar rush is.

While most people can get through a rush and subsequent crash with minimal discomfort, there's an entire group of people who pay a big price for eating too much sugar.

That's because consuming a large amount of processed sugar can trigger feelings of worry, irritability, and sadness — which can be a double whammy if you also deal with depression or anxiety.

But why does sugar cause such a problem?

After eating too much sugar, your body releases insulin to help absorb the excess glucose in the bloodstream and stabilize blood sugar levels. That's a good thing, right? Not necessarily.

Here's why: A sugar rush makes your body work hard to get back to normal levels.

This roller coaster of ups and downs can leave you feeling nervous, foggy, irritable, jittery, and drained.

If you have anxiety or depression, those symptoms are likely ones you already deal with on a daily basis. Sugar will exacerbate them.

2. If it doesn't cause anxiety, it sure makes it worse

If you deal with anxiety, then you know how disastrous it can be to binge on sugar.

The powerful high and subsequent crash can make you feel irritable, shaky, and tense — all side effects that can worsen your anxiety.

But that's not all. Sugar can also weaken your body's ability to respond to stress, which can trigger your anxiety and prevent you from dealing with the cause of the stress.

There've been a few studies that have looked at the connection between sugar and anxiety, but they were both done on rats. While the findings did show a definite link between sugar intake and anxiety, researchers would like to see more studies done on humans.

3. Sugar can increase your risk of developing depression

It's hard to avoid reaching for the sweets, especially after a difficult day. And when you're dealing with depression, sometimes food can serve as a form of self-medication.

But this vicious cycle of consuming sugar to numb your emotions will only make your symptoms of sadness, fatigue, and hopelessness worse.

Overconsumption of sugar triggers imbalances in certain brain chemicals. These imbalances can lead to depression and may even increase the long-term risk of developing a mental health disorder in some people.

In fact, a 2017 study found that men who consumed a high amount of sugar (67 grams or more) each day were 23 percent more likely to receive a diagnosis of clinical depression within five years.

Even though the study just involved men, the link between sugar and depression is also evident in women.



4. Withdrawing from sweets can feel like a panic attack

When it comes to quitting processed sugar, many people recommend going cold turkey. But if you have a history of panic attacks, that might not be a good idea.

Withdrawing from sugar isn't pleasant.

It can cause serious side effects, such as anxiety, irritability, confusion, and fatigue. This has led experts to look at how the withdrawal symptoms from sugar can resemble those of certain drugs.

"Evidence in the literature shows substantial parallels and overlap between drugs of abuse and sugar," explains Uma Naidoo, MD, who's considered the mood-food expert at Harvard Medical School.

When someone misuses a drug, like cocaine, they go into a physiological state of withdrawal when they stop using it.

Naidoo says that people who are consuming high amounts of sugar in their diets can similarly experience the physiological sensation of withdrawal if they suddenly stop consuming sugar.

That's why going cold turkey from sugar may not be the best solution for someone who also has anxiety.

"Suddenly stopping sugar intake can mimic withdrawal and feel like a panic attack," Naidoo says. And if you have an anxiety disorder, this experience of withdrawal can be heightened.

5. Sugar zaps your brain power

Your stomach may be telling you to dive in and drink your way out of that jumbo cherry Iced, but your brain has a different idea.

Researchers at UCLA found that a diet steadily high in fructose from sugary items such as soda slows down your brain, which can hamper memory and learning. The researchers discovered that genes in the brain could be damaged by fructose.

This may impact memory and learning and could even lead to Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, and heart disease.

The main sources of fructose in the American diet include cane sugar (sucrose) and high-fructose corn syrup. This is an important distinction, since the researchers were focused only on fructose.

Granted, their study was done on rats. But what they discovered is worth considering when it comes to your diet — and brain health.



If you're craving sweets, here's what to eat instead

Just because you're ditching processed sugar doesn't mean you have to deny yourself the pleasure of sweet-tasting food. In addition to being a doctor known as an expert on food and mood, Naidoo is also a chef. Here are a few of her favorite low- or no-sugar recipes.

Chef Uma's chai tea smoothie



Ingredients

- 1 serving vanilla protein powder of your choice
- 1/4 avocado
- 1 tbsp. almond butter
- 1 cup almond milk
- 1/8 tsp. each of ground cinnamon, nutmeg, clove, and cardamom spice
- 1/4 tsp. organic vanilla essence
- ice
- a small bit of organic honey to sweeten, if needed

Directions

1. Add all ingredients to your blender. Blend until smooth.

Enjoy.

Chef Uma's tips:

- If you don't have the spices, brew a cup of chai tea using tea bags or whole leaf tea. Use it instead of the almond milk.
- For a thinner smoothie, add almond milk for creaminess.
- Avocado adds creaminess and is a healthy fat to boot!

Chef Uma's chocolate dipped strawberries



Ingredients

- 2 16-oz. containers of strawberries with the stems on
- 1 10-oz. bag of dark chocolate chips
- 1 10-oz. bag of milk chocolate chips

Directions

1. Wash the two containers of strawberries, then air-dry.
 2. Use a double-boiler method to heat the chocolate.
 3. Remove from heat.
 4. Gently stir the chocolate to a smooth consistency.
 5. Quickly dip strawberries in melted chocolate. Dry on sheet pan.
- Set in fridge for 5 to 10 minutes.

Chef Uma's tips:

- Always air-dry or towel-dry the strawberries before dipping them in the melted chocolate. Water will damage the chocolate.
- If the chocolates form a thick mixture, you may need to add 1/2 cup more of milk chocolate chips to help create a smooth consistency for dipping.
- The flavanols, methylxanthines, and polyphenols found in dark chocolate help boost mood, lower anxiety, and fight inflammation.

UPCOMING EVENTS★

What: Whole Health Action Management (WHAM)

When: April 16th and 17th from 9:00am to 4:00pm

Where: Holiday Inn and Suites

Registration Due by January 31st

<https://cmmhc.org/conference-registration/>

CMMHC's Wellness Committee Mission Statement:

It is the mission of the CMMHC Wellness Committee to promote the health and wellness of staff through education and initiatives that:

- Encourage habits of Wellness
- Increase awareness of factors and resources contributing to well-being
- Inspire and empower individuals to take responsibility for their own health.
- Support a sense of community

Brought to you by your

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