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Getting Off Sugar

My husband loves sugar. In fact, I think that he may love it more than he loves me sometimes, but I really can't blame him (I mean, sugar doesn't make him take the garbage out, or is short with him after a long, hard day). I do try to buy foods with less sugar in them, but they just sit in the cupboards only to be ignored and eventually forgotten. My husband claims that in a few years he won't be able to eat anything that he likes. I actually give him until next week.

But, alas my loving husband is not alone. Scientists claim that our appetites are actually hardwired to crave sugar. Sweet is the first taste humans prefer from birth, and not just because it tastes good.

Sugar, a simple carbohydrate, actually stimulates the release of the feel-good brain chemical serotonin. The taste of sugar also releases endorphins that calm and relax us. Think of it as a Hershey Kisses-high, without the track marks.

Unfortunately, this sense of glee only lasts for a little while until the body returns back to its low serotonin state, making you crave more sugar and carbohydrates.

Nutritionists believe that people develop sugar cravings because of an insulin imbalance. Insulin controls the blood sugar levels and converts the sugar that we eat into energy. The more sugar we eat, the greater the energy surge that we experience. But what goes up must come down. As the blood sugar levels drop, our body's need for more sugar increases. Eventually, that same "hit" of sugar will not affect us like it did at the beginning, and we need higher doses of the stuff for the same kick.

If this is vaguely starting to sound like an addiction, then you are correct. Sugar is a nasty little habit that is hidden in almost EVERYTHING that we eat.

If you want to jump off the sugar band wagon, try these tips to banish your sweet cravings.

1. Aim for hormonal balance

Sugar and high-refined carbohydrates like white rice, pasta and white flour are the ones that really mess with our insulin levels. Avoid these and instead add a balance of protein, whole-grains and fat to your diet. Fats and proteins will also slow the absorption of carbohydrates into your bloodstream, giving you a constant state of energy over a longer period of time.

2. Eat small meals throughout the day.

Eating regularly will keep your energy levels even all day and lessen your cravings dramatically.

3. Eat fibre.

The higher the fibre content in the food, the slower the sugar enters your bloodstream. Eat whole-grains (not whole-wheat! Buy products that have **whole-grain** listed as one of the first two ingredients), flax seeds, vegetables and fruits.

4. Take vitamin supplements.

“Cracking the Metabolic Code” (by James LaValle N.D.) claims that if you have sugar cravings, then you should try the following supplements: Relora®, a unique blend of plants from around the world and used in Traditional Chinese Medicine, glucosol, vanadium and cinnamon extract. Other supplements found to decrease cravings are B vitamins, chromium, magnesium and daily zinc supplements.

5. Read your food labels.

There are sugars hidden in many foods and under many guises. Look for the words high-fructose corn syrup, fructose, sucrose, glucose, lactose, dextrose, maltose, honey and sorbitol. If these names appear in the first few ingredients, steer clear, and if the product contains high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) **anywhere** in the food label, do not buy it, period. The research regarding the harmful effects that HFCS has on the body is overwhelming.

6. Drink plenty of water.

I tell all my clients to drink before they eat. Quite often, the body is not hungry when a craving comes on, it is simply dehydrated.

7. Just don't buy it!

Simple enough - if it's not in the house, you can't eat it.

8. Satisfy your cravings.

If you are really craving something sweet, have a piece of fruit, or a piece of 70%+ cocoa chocolate bar. Or, try my favourite sugar-busting treat - a low calorie hot chocolate.