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# Sweet misery

It's addictive, aging and dangerous – so why can't we just give it up? **Elle Blakeman** investigates the bitter truth about sugar

Someone predicted this. In 1972, British professor John Yudkin wrote a book called *Pure, White and Deadly* that detailed the adverse affects of eating sugar.

'Everything this man said in 1972 was the God's honest truth and if you want to read a true prophecy, you find this book,' said author Robert Lustig, in his YouTube video *Sugar: the Bitter Truth*, which has now been credited with kick-starting the anti-sugar movement, some 37 years after Yudkin first wrote his 'prophecy'. Lustig, a professor of paediatric endocrinology at the University of California, posted a talk on YouTube, urging people to treat sugar as a toxin.

Prepare to hear the words 'sugar-free' a lot over the next few months. Not in a chewing-gum-ad way, more your colleague turning down your offer of a slice of birthday cake because they, like the Wrigley's *Extra* in your pocket, are now 'sugar-free'.

It's the new 5:2, which was the new Atkins, which replaced the low-fat diet, which replaced people just eating when they were hungry and stopping when they were full, but is there actually something in this one? If certain corners are to be believed, sugar is the new tobacco. Worse, actually, because tobacco at least can be given up entirely – if not easily – we don't need it to live. Glucose, however, is







essential to our survival, it's what our bodies run on, which is why we are so efficient at storing it.

It would be easy to dismiss the anti-sugar movement as just another diet fad, but the facts are that, despite trying harder than ever to control our weight, 63 per cent of Britons are overweight, while a third of those are clinically obese. Fat reduction is now the most popular cosmetic surgery and gastric bands are now considered an alternative to diets. Something is making us fat, and it isn't just a lack of willpower.

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'The body recognises calories from fat and tells you that you're full (by releasing a hormone called leptin), however fructose – the natural sugar in fruit and one half of granulated sugar (the other half being pure glucose) – bypasses this reaction in the body, and therefore the "stop" mechanism doesn't work,' says nutritionist Kim Pearson.

Countless processed foods contain added sugar, while low-fat foods (developed when the market opened up as post-war dieters waged war on fat) are full of the white stuff, in an attempt

to make up for the missed flavour. Ironically, 'low-fat' food could be making us fatter.

While some are arguing that comparing sugar to tobacco is alarmist, teeth rotting and the odd spare tyre are the least of our worries if the sugar opposition is to be believed – excess consumption of the sweet stuff (which according to the World Health Organisation is roughly five to nine teaspoons a day – the equivalent of two small pieces of fruit) can be linked to heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's and, of course, diabetes – the ticking time bomb of our collapsing health service.

Humans are slow to adapt – we know this from the stress response that still has us flooded with cortisol and adrenaline when we are merely seething in a traffic jam. In a similar vein, we are evolutionally designed to like sugar – sweet things being less likely to poison us than sour ones. However, in the 'wild', our natural sources of sugar would be limited to how much fruit or honey we could get our hands, which would be few and far between.

Today, the caveman life is over, and not only are we stuck with a sweet tooth that can now be satisfied whenever we feel like it (which, given that sugar is one of the most addictive substances we can ingest, is always), we have also figured out how to extract sugar from its associated fibre, which slows down the effect of the sugar on our systems. When sugar is refined from cane or sugar beet, 99 per cent of the original food (i.e. the fibre) is removed, leaving just a sugar syrup, meaning that its effect is substantially more potent than nature intended. Our bodies haven't adapted to deal with this.

Sugar is also a dieter's worst friend for another reason; while it obviously adds nutritionally empty calories, it also puts pressure on your liver, which is a key organ when it comes to metabolism.

'Your liver is the judge and jury, the king and queen of your body,' says David Marshall, fitness expert and owner of the Bodydoctor personal training gym (bodydoctor.com). 'While your liver is busy processing sugar, it can't burn fat,'

he says. 'If you want to lose weight, you have to cut the sugar – it's that simple.'

If worrying about your waist isn't enough to tempt you away from the sweet stuff, then perhaps your skin might prove more of a concern; the enzymes produced when we eat sugar (as a result of the insulin spike) break down the natural collagen and elastin in your skin, leading to sagging skin and wrinkles faster than you can say Botox. It can also exacerbate skin conditions such as acne, rosacea and dark patches.

So if it's that bad, why don't we just give it up? Well firstly, it's addictive. Secondly, it's in almost all prepared foods. From bread to balsamic vinegar, sugar is added in droves, a fact that is causing a backlash from several health experts. In his YouTube video, Lustig called for sugar-laden foods to be taxed heavily and banned for anyone under 18, while the head of Amsterdam's health service, Paul van der Velpen, recently argued that sugar should be heavily regulated, claiming that it is 'the most dangerous drug of the times and can still be easily acquired everywhere.'

'Just like alcohol and tobacco, sugar is actually a drug. There is an important role for government. The use of sugar should be discouraged. And users should be made aware of the dangers,' he said on a public health website.'

Comparing sugar to drugs may not be as far-fetched as you think. As we are not designed to deal with this potent 'hit' of sugar, our bodies are more susceptible to forming an addiction to it. However, as with any addiction, it doesn't take long for the rush of pleasure to wear off and the withdrawal symptoms to kick in, a point David Gillespie makes in his best-selling book, *Sweet Poison*. 'We are now so used to sugar that we 'need' it just to feel normal again,' says Gillespie, who lost a staggering six stone just from cutting out sugar. 'The results are in,' he writes. 'If you feed humans fructose for the first 40 years of their lives, you will get an obesity epidemic.'

Perhaps 'pure, white and deadly' isn't so far-fetched after all. 



#### FIVE WAYS TO GIVE UP SUGAR:

By nutritionist Kim Pearson  
([kim-pearson.co.uk](http://kim-pearson.co.uk))

- #1 Ensure you're eating enough protein. Having a protein-based breakfast will help regulate your blood sugar from the start of the day. Many cereals are packed with sugar – avoid them!
- #2 Read labels carefully, even seemingly healthy foods can be loaded with sugar. Beware of 'low-fat' foods.
- #3 Ditch the fruit juices and smoothies – they might seem healthy, but they are full of fruit sugars. Swap to water with slices of fresh lemon, lime or orange instead.
- #4 Don't skip meals – this will lead to a slump in energy that will lead to sugar cravings.
- #5 Supplement – if you need a little extra help try supplementation. BioCare's SucroGuard can help regulate the blood sugar level whilst 5-HTP can help control cravings.

