

YOUR HEALTH

Defeat your addiction to diet soda in one week

The key to quitting is knowing what drives the cravings.

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Sure, diet soda isn't the sugar and calorie bomb of regular soda, but it's not exactly harmless either. "Not only is there little evidence that diet drinks help people lose or maintain weight," says Marion Nestle, professor of nutrition at New York University and author of "Soda Politics: Taking on Big Soda (and Winning)," "but there's some evidence that diet drinks cause similar metabolic problems to sugary drinks."

Indeed, a University of Minnesota study of nearly 10,000 adults found that just one diet soda a day triggered a 34 percent higher risk of metabolic syndrome, that cluster of symptoms that includes belly fat and high cholesterol and can lead to heart disease. "Anything with a heavy sweet taste, even if it's not technically sugar, may stimulate insulin release," explains Dr. **Jacob Teitelbaum**, author of "The Complete Guide to Beating Sugar Addiction." The artificially sweetened bubbly has also been shown to cause tooth decay, thinning bones and kidney decline.

To curb cola consumption, you could try weaning yourself slowly: First, cut out one can a day for two weeks; then, mix the remaining one with

water; then, go down to half a can. But Teitelbaum believes there's a better way. "It's an addiction — there's something driving the craving," he says. "If you don't address what's driving the craving, it won't go away."

Here's how you might be using diet soda to achieve various goals — and the healthier way to meet those needs.

1. You need energy.

If you pop a can of diet soda when you're looking for a pick-me-up, it could be the caffeine you need.

Your diet soda detox: Try coffee or tea, which are chock-full of antioxidants for a good measure of disease protection. It's OK to lightly sweeten them — as long as you choose stevia, a naturally sweet plant extract, or a teaspoon of honey, and not three packets of table sugar or the artificial stuff. Sandon recommends fruit-flavored iced tea such as cold brew peach or berry by Celestial Seasonings, because the fruit provides a natural sweetness.

2. Low blood sugar.

If you get irritable, shaky, or lightheaded and feel overwhelmed by everyday stressors, it could be your adrenal glands need support. "Their job is to make more sugar during periods of stress," Teitelbaum says. "When they get exhaust-

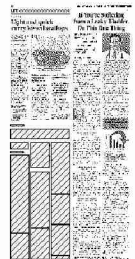
ed from being chronically activated, your blood sugar will drop and you won't have the hormones to manage it."

Your diet soda detox: Teitelbaum advises dispensing with as many day-to-day stressors as you can. He also suggests avoiding blood sugar dips by not skipping meals (aim for three meals and two snacks daily); spreading your protein throughout the day (add grilled chicken or chickpeas to that pasta salad); and keeping a supply of nourishing snacks (like a third of a cup of nuts and raisins) on hand for a blood sugar reboot. Nuts contain healthy fats that slow the absorption of sugar, and raisins have natural sugars that will bring you back into balance.

3. You're (unconsciously) feeding yeast in your body.

If you have chronic nasal congestion, sinusitis, spastic colon or irritable bowel syndrome, you could be heeding sugar cravings caused by yeast or candida overgrowth in your intestinal tract.

Your diet soda detox: "A good probiotic and getting off sugar will kill the yeasty beasts," Teitelbaum says. In the meantime, find a diet soda alternative that doesn't feel like punishment. Teitelbaum likes tea with stevia, cinna-



mon and nutmeg.

4. Your hormones are in flux.

If you're PMSing or heading into perimenopause, hormonal fluctuations can cause insomnia, headaches, fatigue or depression, all of which trigger sugar cravings.

Your diet soda detox: Explore ways to kick up your estrogen, which increases the feel-good brain chemicals serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine. Teitelbaum recommends taking a page

from Japanese women and grabbing a handful of edamame or drinking soy milk. If that doesn't cut it and you need something sweet, have nature's treats – an orange, a banana, a handful of berries or two squares of dark chocolate.

It may take 7-10 days to stop the craving Teitelbaum says. And if you still indulge occasionally, that's OK, too. "The bottom line is really to drink sodas of any kind in moderation," Sandon says. "By this I mean not every meal

or every day. Save them for special occasions."



Diet soda may not have the sugar, but evidence says it causes your body to react the same way. SHUTTERSTOCK