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Is Your Sweet Tooth an Addiction?

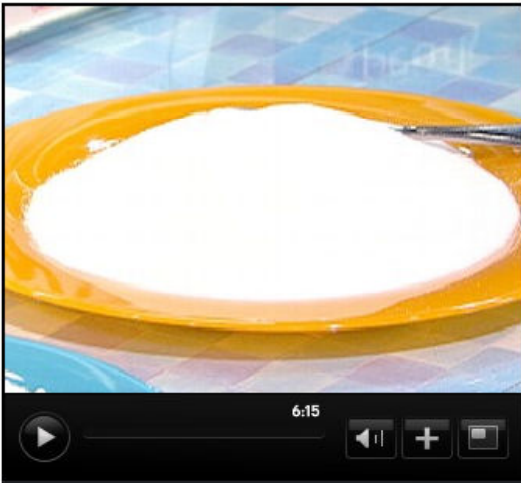
A Lesson in Sugar Cravings and How to Tame Them

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Are you a [sweet food junkie](#)? A slave to Snickers and soft drinks? Do you rely on that mid-afternoon sugar rush to get you through the day?



Then you may well have a [sugar addiction](#), according to Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, author of "Beat Sugar Addiction Now."

Over three decades of treating patients struggling with fatigue, pain and [obesity](#), Teitelbaum has identified what he says are four types of sugar addicts and in his recent book, he explains what causes these issues and how to kick the sugar habit.

"There are changes in our metabolism, in the stress hormones, that drive us to eat sugar," says Teitelbaum, who is also director of the National Fibromyalgia and

Tips for beating your addiction to sugar.

Fatigue Centers. "I would classify it as an addiction."

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But Teitelbaum's approach is a controversial one. Because many of his theories about sugar addiction come from his work with patients -- and not peer-reviewed studies -- his methods are met with skepticism by many dieticians.

"I don't think we have the science to support the notion that sugar is addictive," says Samantha Heller, registered dietitian and author of "Get Smart: Samantha Heller's Nutrition Prescription For Boosting Brain Power & Optimizing Total Body Health."

Heller also points out that an article published in the journal *Clinical Nutrition* in June found that there is no evidence that sugar -- or any food for that matter -- can actually become addicting to humans.

But regardless of whether you can actually be a "sugar addict," physicians and dieticians agree that America has got a huge and

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problematic sweet tooth -- one that is exacerbating numerous health concerns such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes.



The average American consumes about 156 pounds of added sugar each year per capita, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Where do you weigh in on sugar consumption? Are you a junkie or a responsible sweet tooth? (Lauren Burke/Getty Images)

The Four Types of Sugar Junkies

According to Teitelbaum, overdosing the body with sugar, especially over the course of months or years, can lead to many physical and mental maladies that sufferers often don't realize stem from their diet.

Obesity, weakened immune system, chronic fatigue, hormonal problems and gastrointestinal issues are some of the more common effects of long-term sugar addiction, Teitelbaum says. Psychological issues, such as anxiety and depression, can also be aggravated by consuming too much sugar.

Those who are chronically fatigued -- whether from lack of sleep, overworking or poor nutrition -- tend to reach for caffeine, sugar, or most often both, in the form of soda and energy drinks. These are what Teitelbaum calls Type 1 sugar addicts.

The cure? For all forms of sugar addiction, Teitelbaum suggests cutting back on sugar (and/or replacing it with sugar-free alternatives), cutting out excess caffeine intake, eating more whole, unprocessed foods, and getting enough sleep.

For Type 1 addicts specifically, he adds regular exercise and nutritional supplements to support the body's immune system.

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Some people turn to sugar (and caffeine) to fuel their fast-paced, high stress life. These people often get anxious and irritable when they get hungry due to low blood sugar, says Teitelbaum, and he calls them Type 2 addicts. They are constantly in a fight-or-flight mindset, which causes stress and overtaxes the adrenal system.

Vitamin B5 and licorice are specifically recommended for these addicts, Teitelbaum says, in addition to lifestyle changes to reduce stress levels.

Teitelbaum's Type 3 addict is controversial among dieticians. These addicts, he says, have an overgrowth of yeast in their gut because of the sugar in their diet.

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This yeast, in turn, ramps up the body's craving for more sugar, he says. This yeast growth can be caused by excessive use of antibiotics or steroids, or by long-term high sugar diets and are dispelled, according to Teitelbaum, with strong probiotics and sugar cut-backs.

While probiotics are "great" for the digestive track, Heller says she doubts that sugar could cause an overgrowth of yeast. Because research has only been done on a few of the numerous bacteria present in a healthy gut, it is hard to say what role sugar could play in an overgrowth, she says.

Finally, hormonal fluctuations in women entering menopause can cause anxiety, depression, and insulin resistance that can also lead to sugar addictions, Teitelbaum says. Alongside the general tricks for kicking the addiction, bio-identical hormones and/or natural remedies to regulate hormone levels are recommended, he says.

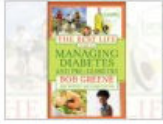
Sugar Addict Skepticism

Teitelbaum's methods are certainly not widely accepted.

Most physicians wholly support -- for general health -- his prescription for a cut-back in the consumption of excess sugars, eating more whole foods, and regularly getting a good night's sleep.

However, when it comes to his use of supplements and his linking of sugar consumption to yeast overgrowth, depression and chronic fatigue and pain, many physicians say he goes too far.

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"These ideas are not supported by the science," says Dr. Ken Fujioka, director of the Nutrition and Metabolic Research Center and the Center for Weight Management at Scripps Clinic of [San Diego](#).

To Teitelbaum's argument that sugar spikes and crashes blood glucose, altering mood and energy levels, Fujioka says that these fluctuations are all within the normal range of blood sugar and wouldn't be responsible for such side effects.

This criticism gets to the heart of the clash between Teitelbaum's methods and those of his critics. While much of the medical community relies on peer-reviewed studies and tangible blood levels of certain chemicals, Teitelbaum often draws from clinical experience.

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"The 'normal range' is problematic," he says, because often patients who are technically within that range will experience symptoms. For example, half of those with hypothyroidism symptoms are technically within the normal range, he says.

"A lot of my work is based on what I see in my patients, and what I see works -- and we're talking thousands of patients here," he says.

At the end of the day, the message of Teitelbaum's recent book, to improve health and energy by cutting back on sugar, is one that the [American Heart Association](#), the [Department of Health](#) and Human Services and other health organizations all support as well.

And nutritionists note that whether you do it with the help of probiotics or just by skipping the Slurpie, replacing empty sugar calories with healthy, nutritive foods, is something to strive for.
