



Should we give up on sugar?



ISABELLE DELALEU | SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2015

Sugar is now accused of a lot of ailments like fatigue, diabetes and digestive disorders. Should we just keep an eye on it, avoid it as much or delete it completely from our diet?



Books that advocate a radical and definitive break with our constant sugar companion, are fast filling up

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bookshelves. War on sugar has been declared, even though in itself, sugar is not harmful. It's converted into energy and 'feeds' the muscles and brain. It causes a parallel elevation of blood sugar levels which is rapidly regulated by the pancreas by producing insulin. That's when everything is going well. But as soon as the abuse of sugar kicks in, the machine goes awry.

To understand why sugar crystallizes so much hatred, you have to see the figures. Our consumption of sugar will be stable at 70g per day per person for thirty years and that's already beyond the 50g maximum recommended by the World Health Organisation. Above all, this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Here, we'll talk about sucrose (powdered sugar or in pieces) and not 'hidden' sugars in foods. "Today, sugar is present in virtually all common industrial products," says Dr. Reginald Allouche, physician, researcher and author of *The Sugar Fun at risk prédiabète*¹. Even salty foods contain them, be it meats, vinegar, pickles, preserves, soups, ketchup or other sauces. "Instead of bursting with natural sugars, vitamins and minerals (those fruit, for example), we mainly consume these industrial sugars that provide only 'empty calories' without nutritional value," says Valérie Espinasse, doctor of pharmacy, micro-nutritionist and author of *I quit sugar!* (ed. First).

1. Odile Jacob Edition 2. Official figures of Cedus (Center for Studies and Documentation of sugar).

FATIGUE, DIGESTIVE DISORDERS AND OBESITY

Initially, this influx of sugars in our diet will add strain to our figure and morale. "The energy they bring depletes our organs – the pancreas, but also the liver and intestine – affects our hormones, lowers our energy and accelerates aging," says Valérie Espinasse. The intestinal flora of 'sweet tooth' is also frequently disrupted. *Candida albicans*, a yeast naturally present in our intestine that feeds on sugars, can easily proliferate, causing digestive disorders, fatigue, recurrent fungal infections, etc.

According to **Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum**, medical spokesperson for integrative medicine and author of *Pick sugar* (ed. Marabout), excess sugar is also partly responsible for an increase of anxiety (for exhaustion adrenals involved in stress management), chronic fatigue syndrome and irritable bowel syndrome (linked to the overgrowth of yeast) and migraines following hypoglycaemia. For many of us, the day begins with various sugars in our meals – breakfast cereal, fruit juice, dairy, fruit, jam, bread crumbs and rusks. These foods are high in glycemic index (GI) because they quickly increase blood glucose levels in the blood. The pancreas then has to produce more insulin to rapidly reduce blood glucose to normal. The violent decrease in blood sugar causes a reactive hypoglycemia. A vicious circle.

OTHER DANGERS OF OUR SWEET EXCESS

Apart from cavities (risk increases beyond 50g of sugar per day), 'too much' sugar is particularly involved in the development of prediabetes and type 2 diabetes by overworking the pancreas. This is incurable and may cause cardiovascular complications, hepatic, neurological, renal and genital conditions. Experts also see in recent years an epidemic of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NASH). The disorder caused by sugar violation (and no alcohol) is a deep liver disease which, moreover, is filled with grease. Hence its name, 'fatty liver syndrome'. A US publication in the journal, *Hepatology* managed to quantify the risk: a soda a day increases the risk by... 55%!

STOP OR JUST SLOW DOWN?

It is imperative to go easy on the sugar. A move that is proving much more difficult than one might think because sugar is addictive. While some experts prefer to speak of instinct for sweets rather than real addiction, a Bordeaux 2007 study has shown in rats that a sugar addiction is even stronger than cocaine! That is why some argue for a real withdrawal, including the United States. It is an extreme and untenable position because sugars are everywhere in nature: in fruits and vegetables, cereals, breads and starches. To completely deprive someone of it would be impossible. For Valérie Espinasse, detoxification, with cancellation of the 'sweet' taste (except fruit) but allowing legumes and whole foods seems nonetheless indispensable. "Sugar is addictive, it must go through a

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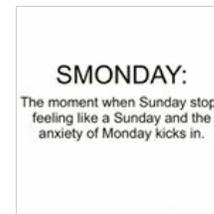
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complete withdrawal especially since, if the first few days can be difficult, the benefits are felt very quickly before disappearing like magic.”

Other experts are more skeptical, especially as the last decades have shown that the limits and perverse effects of extreme dieting (“free” sugars or fats) is inefficient and difficult to keep up. For Dr. Allouche, the solution is rather moderate and controlled consumption: “We must not demonize sugars but adopt a sensible position to have fun without excess with foods that taste sweet and, in parallel, escape the hidden sugars in processed foods and question its exercise of ‘burning’.” Because ultimately it’s good that’s what it’s all about: do not starve yourself or get frustrated, but consume less and better.

Isabelle Delaleu

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