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When you think of sugar, what comes to mind?

Maybe you've seen Jamie Oliver dumping a wheelbarrow full of white cubes on the TED stage and accusing governments (who promote children eating sugar at school) of child abuse. (1)

Perhaps you've heard of National Sugar Awareness Week, a UK initiative focused on the key actions the government needs to take to initiate a sugar reduction program. (2)

As an even more dramatic case, maybe you've seen that the World Cancer Research Foundation has created a policy brief called "Curbing Global Sugar Consumption" in an attempt to assist governments in reducing the amount of sugar consumed at an international population level. According to their global research, not only does sugar contribute hugely to the world's obesity epidemic, but it's also fueling the growth rates of non-communicable disease...including eleven different kinds of cancer. (3)

Or maybe you just think about how much you love candy bars and ice cream.

Whatever your associations are with sugar, whether it's a concern for you and your family, or merely a sweet-toothed habit that you've casually thought about kicking, Ground Leaf wants to help you see that you can still enjoy sweets and treats without being worried about heart disease, diabetes, or obesity. As with all foods - especially whole foods - it's all about quality. Not all sugars are the same, and by switching to whole-foods sugars, not only are you preventing the epidemic of disease, but you're doing wonders for your health and energy levels.

White Sugar

Table sugar, also known as sucrose, is a bleached, refined, and crystallized industrial product usually derived from either cane or beet sugars. This is the kind of sugar being attacked by the World Health Organization and Parent-Teacher-Associations all over America. It's such a common food additive that some experts estimate the average American consumes 20 teaspoons every single day, amounting to an additional 66 pounds of sugar consumed over a year. (4) (5)

Fructose

Fruits contain fructose, and when found in this form with the accompanying fiber, vitamins, and vast nutrition is a tasty, whole, and healthy food. However, when fructose is isolated and processed and added to sweeten foods (like high-fructose corn syrup) the benefits go out the window. Part of the concern with fructose is that unlike glucose, fructose is metabolized by the liver, has a different metabolic pathway, and does not provide energy for your cells or your brain. (6) (7)

Glucose

Glucose is the energy currency of your cells, and is your body's preferred energy source. Also known as blood sugar, glucose provides fuel for activities and brain functioning. The result of broken-down starches and complex carbohydrates, glucose is essential for healthy thinking, self-discipline, and other psychological processes that require mental effort. (8)

Soda

One of the hottest topics when it comes to the rising levels of childhood obesity is soda. In fact, this entire article could easily be about the dangers of soda, a multi-billion dollar industry fueled by celebrity endorsements, massive advertising budgets, and disease-enhancing additives. The colors in cola are linked to cancer, drinking pop actually dehydrates you and breaks down the enamel on your teeth, and this "wonder-drink" also increases heart disease and obesity. If that's not enough of a reason to pass on the bubbles, just think: some sodas actually contain flame retardants. (9)

Add to that the fact that diet soda contains aspartame, which claims have linked to birth defects, multiple types of cancer, weight gain, memory loss, and depression and it's clear that diet soda is NOT a viable alternative. If there's one processed food/drink it would benefit you to cut, even in small quantities, it's soda. (10)

Alternative Sugars

Alright. Now that you've gone through all of this data around processed sugar and are hopefully feeling more versed in the dangers, let's get to the good stuff: whole, unprocessed alternatives that don't come with all the nasties.

Molasses, brown rice syrup, agave, maple syrup, honey, coconut sugar and stevia have all gotten a lot of attention (and sales) as a result of the campaign against sugar. And while these very well may be a healthier option than your straight-up table sugar, nothing compares to a whole-food. Even though "natural" sweeteners are more popular and seemingly don't carry the baggage of white sugar, they are still processed, and add significant calories to your diet with very little nutritional value. (11)

The best solution? You guessed it. Whole foods. Blend dates into a paste or, if necessary, use date sugar for sweetening recipes. Both are closest to a whole food, unprocessed product, which means your body can break them down slowly, and in a more natural way that doesn't contribute to addiction, overconsumption, and/or obesity.

Of course there's always nature's dessert as well: whole, organic fruits which are packed with nutrition and sweet goodness. Fruits are so incredibly healthy, Ground Leaf recommends that you beware of any eating program which limits fruits or labels them as "bad." A whole food coming directly from the earth, which is unprocessed and bursting with energy is not "bad" by any definition.

You've heard it once, and you'll hear it again: Eat whole, unprocessed foods and watch your body transform into the beautiful, trim, and energized organism Mother Nature intended you to be.

- 1) https://www.ted.com/talks/jamie_oliver?language=en
- 2) <http://www.foodactive.org.uk/tag/national-sugar-awareness-week-2015/>
- 3) <http://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/our-policy-work/curbing-global-sugar-consumption>
- 4) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sucrose>
- 5) http://www.sugarscience.org/the-growing-concern-of-overconsumption/#.WA0W_pMrIUF
- 6) <https://authoritynutrition.com/why-is-fructose-bad-for-you/>
- 7) <http://healthyeating.sfgate.com/difference-between-sucrose-glucose-fructose-8704.html>
- 8) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glucose>
- 9) <https://foodrevolution.org/blog/food-and-health/soda-health-risks/>
- 10) <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2011/11/06/aspartame-most-dangerous-substance-added-to-food.aspx>
- 11) <https://www.drfuhrman.com/learn/library/articles/11/the-health-risks-of-natural-sweeteners>