

# ARE YOU ADDICTED TO SUGAR

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Experts say that the last decade has seen a tremendous increase in sugar consumption, leading to several lifestyle diseases, the most common one being diabetes. Take the example of 43-year-old Sharad Tiwari, who thought that a small slab of chocolate every night after dinner was no big deal. It was only when routine tests detected something amiss that a shocked Sharad was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Obesity bariatric surgeon Dr Abhay Agrawal says that today, loading of sugar in the system is so high that every part of our body is layered with thick sugar. "The minute you finish your meal, you keep that little space in your stomach for dessert. Your eyes are always glued to sweets available around you. Just eating one is not enough, you ask for more and more without realising that you have completed the packet. This dependency or craving for more is addiction to sugar. Sugar is as addictive as a drug, alcohol or tobacco. Just like these, sugar causes the release of the hormone dopamine — a feel good hormone, making you feel high immediately. The feeling is so soothing that the brain signals for more craving sugar to feel the same high," says Dr Agrawal.

Adds physician endocrinologist, diabetologist, antiageing specialist and obesity consultant Dr Deepak Chaturvedi, "The threshold of sweetness has gone so high that we now don't feel the sweetness of natural sources. Artificial sugar is available everywhere — in our kitchen, dining table, restaurants, etc. Sugary sweets are the part of every good, bad and ugly

occasion. Sugar is addictive and the withdrawal symptoms are as bad as those of tobacco and alcohol. Excessive sugar consumption is directly associated with hyperinsulinemia, insulin resistance, obesity and subsequently pancreas exhaustion and diabetes mellitus."

Nutritionist Carlyne Remedios says that when we talk about sugar, it does not just mean the table sugar that we add to our cup of tea in the morning or that piece of chocolate we eat post lunch. "Unfortunately, these are only the most obvious sources of sugar. The ones that we don't see is the sugar hidden in ketchups, ready-to-eat meals, cold drinks, bakery goods and low fat versions of foods. Sugar in excess amounts is a leading cause of dyslipidemia (high levels of triglycerides and low levels of HDL — the good fats), a leading cause of cardiovascular disease. Excessive intake of sugar also leads to obesity, which is one of the leading causes of diabetes. India is only second to China when it comes to the number of diabetics. We have approximately 63 million diabetics, which is expected to rise to over a 100 million by 2030," she says.

## HOW DOES SUGAR CAUSE PROBLEMS?

"Sugar stimulates the hedonic pleasure centres in the brain and thus has propensity for compulsion and addiction. Excessive sugar intake suppresses sex steroids (testosterone, estrogen, progesterone, DHEA etc) and has adverse effects on overall, sexual and reproductive health. It also causes the sudden release of insulin



Reading food labels carefully is extremely important. Don't just read the sugar and calorie count. You also need to check terms like HFCS, cane sugar, glucose, lactose, maltose, dextrose, malt syrup, molasses and brown rice syrup.

from the pancreas leading to hyperinsulinemia and subsequently insulin resistance, which, in turn, is associated with obesity, hyperlipidemia and diabetes. Insulin resistance is also associated with PCOD, hirsutism, skin pigmentation and even premature ageing. Hyperlipidemia is associated with compromised cardiac health. Finally, excessive sugar intake is associated with dental problems," Dr says Chaturvedi.

All carbohydrates ultimately break down into sugar but the problem is that sucrose or table sugar is made up of glucose plus fructose, and fructose is not metabolised the same way as other carbohydrates. "In fact it tricks our brains into thinking that you aren't full and that is why we keep craving more. In addition, this excess fructose gets stored in our livers causing fatty liver. Fructose is present in almost all foods in the market today — ready-to-eat meals, ketchups, canned fruit juices and nectars, cold drinks, low fat varieties of foods, etc. So, even though we might cut out the most obvious sources of

you more harm than good," explains Carlyne.

## STICK TO NATURAL FOODS

Foods like colas, pasta, noodles, white polished rice, breads, packed cereals, biscuits, pastries, khari, refined flour, sabudana, energy bars or drinks, ready-to-cook soups, sauces, dressings all contain sugar and are best avoided. "Sticking to whole cereals, and home-made preparations like wheat chappatis, oats upma, jowar or bajra khichadi, nachni chillas keeps your insulin levels optimal, energy levels constant, and enhance immunity and strength. Complex carbohydrates from vegetables provide essential vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fibre as the source of energy. Since most of them are low in sugar, they won't cause imbalances. Instead, these nutritious foods provide highly potent protecting and repairing nutrients that the body needs to stay young. Include celery, lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes, onions, garlic, radish, all the gourd variety, and green, yellow and orange colour vegetables in your diet up to three to four servings per day. Starchy vegetables like potatoes, colocalasia, yam can be taken in restricted amounts like once in a week only one serving (50-70gms). Whole fruits also have fructose but in limited quantity with fibre, vitamins and minerals, enzymes and benefi-

homemade or canned fruit have diminished antioxidant properties and lack fibre leading to consumption of concentrated intake. In a place like India sweets define festivals, add sugar becomes inevitable. time people realise that to lead a sugar-free life," Agrawal.

## HOW TO REDUCE SUGAR CONSUMPTION

- Start by gradually reducing amount of sugar you put in tea everyday.
- Look out for these words on labels — sugar, glucose, high fructose corn syrup
- The next time you feel a sugar rush, grab a glass of water to cut the craving.
- If you are addicted to sugary drinks and cannot give them up immediately, dilute some fresh juice with sodawater and slowly wean yourself off.
- Give yourself time. It takes at least four weeks for your body to accept change but once you do, saying no to sugar you'll feel fresher, energetic and lose weight easily.
- If your cravings disturb your to-day life then you should look for probable underlying medical reasons (like hyperinsulinemia, diabetes, low cortisol levels, growth hormone level, mineral deficiencies, stress etc) and appropriate treatment.
- Sugar cravings with an underlying medical condition are mainly