



SWEET

Surrender

A Matter of Moderation

Some folks claim to be sugar junkies, addicted to the rush of the sweet white grains. Without being too boastful, I think most of you are probably in the Little Leagues compared to me. Some lowlights—until recently, I ate meringues for breakfast, chocolate chips for a morning snack, and jelly beans for a quick rush of energy. I couldn't walk by a display of Peeps without stashing a few in my shopping cart. Then there were those neon-colored marshmallow peanuts...

I'm slightly reformed now, having replaced the meringues and jellybeans with nuts and cereal. But as a person otherwise committed to a healthy lifestyle who has to manage a chronic sugar habit, I was anxious to discover from the experts: how bad is the substance that some foodies call "the white Satan?"

As NovaCare Rehabilitations' Jeanie Subach reminds us, sugar is a form of carbohydrate. Contrary to the bad science behind some diets, carbohydrates in themselves are not evil. "We all need carbohydrates in our diet, particularly if we are athletic," says Subach, a board-certified sports dietician (MA, RD, CSSD, LDN) who teaches at West Chester University. Sugar, she says, occurs naturally in fruits and vegetables, which provide a lot of nutrients for

a small number of calories. But we aren't talking about that kind of sugar, are we? Instead, we are discussing the type that the Penn States Health Care Service defines as table sugar, derived from sugar beets and sugar cane plants. Brown sugar, corn syrup, honey and maple sugar are also chemically similar to the grains we use to sweeten coffee and tea.

And it is that kind of carbohydrate that needs to be consumed in moderation, says the registered dietician and her colleague Patti Skahan (MS, RD, LDN), also a registered dietician, who teaches at Eastern University. Unlike complex carbohydrates, like those in whole grains and vegetables, "Sugar is an empty calorie," says Skahan, a recreational biker and runner. Instead of grabbing the cookies, "Think about things you could eat that provide nutrition, complex carbs, vitamins and minerals," she recommends. Yogurt, vegetables with low fat dip, fresh fruit, whole grain crackers, popcorn, nuts or trail mix are all nutritious snacks. "Watch out for processed sugars in cakes, candy and soft drinks," advises Subach, a mother of three and marathon runner. "These sugars provide empty calories with little or no nutrients."

There's no magic equation for figuring out how much simple sugar is too much.

Instead, Subach suggests checking out the food pyramid site (www.mypyramid.gov) designed by the United States government and plugging in your individual numbers to see how many discretionary calories you have in added fats, oil and sweets. In the general class of discretionary calories Subach includes sports drinks like Gatorade—except for those who exercise. "No sports drinks unless you are sweating (from exercise)" is the rule in the Subach household. So, unless you are recovering from that long run or hockey game, watch the Hershey's Kisses (by the way, Subach allows herself four dark ones a day). But both nutritionists agree that deprivation can be dangerous, often leading to overindulgence or unhealthy behavior around food. "If you deprive yourself, then when the food is in front of you, you won't have control," says Skahan. "I enjoy food, and I don't want to be the food police." If a parent is a recovering sugarholic, how do they help their kids learn good nutritional habits (do as I say, not as I used to do)?

Although schools are more interested in promoting healthy food decisions than they used to be, parents are the ones most capable of teaching their children how to make wise decisions. Examining the decline of soft drink sales in the public schools, Center for Science in the Public Interest Margo G. Wootan

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By Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans

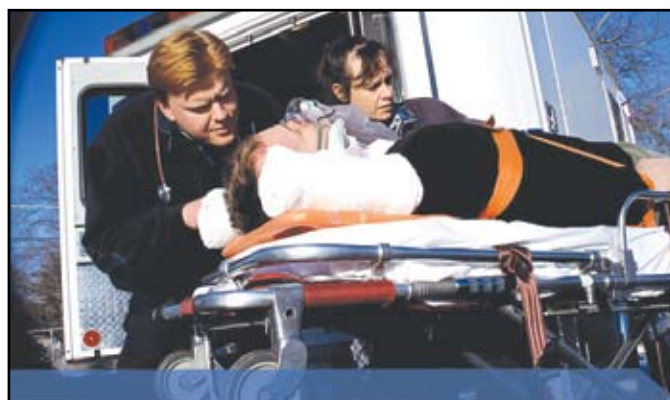
praised the move but added a caveat. But then she added, in a CSPI press release, that she was concerned about the increase of sales of “so-called sports drinks,” which she termed “little more than sugar with added salt.” When kids switch from Coke to Powerade, there is little progress, asserted Wootan, “It’s just going from the fire back up into the frying pan.”

When she packs her children’s lunch, Subach includes a whole wheat bread sandwich, fruit, milk, and a small sweet portion-controlled snack, because she says, “I don’t want to set them up to be the kids who go to other people’s homes and gorges on candy.” When helping your kids make good food choices, use your common sense, advise Subach and Skahan. Help them learn about good nutrition by having them look at charts and websites and figure it out for themselves. Most of all, get them moving. Then get moving yourself. “If you are physically active, you can eat more food, says Subach, who points out that one doesn’t see a lot of overweight runners at races.

Even the two dieticians, who constantly strive for healthy eating habits, admit it is easier to give advice, than to follow every day. This leads to one more conclusion—if you yield to the lure of that chocolate bar or a doughnut (or four) today, don’t beat up on yourself. Remember- tomorrow you can have the chance to make different choices. Remember to move out of full-blown sugarholism into the category of recovering addict, one healthy decision at a time.



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