

Sugar, the real culprit?

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When people think of sugar, their first thoughts are usually *candy, unhealthy, and too much energy*. Many people believe that sugar intake negatively affects the body and its functions. For years myths about sugar and its effects on the body have been circulating. Many people believe that sugar is the cause of hyperactivity, especially in children, and some medical issues such as diabetes. For instance, when most people imagine a cartoon image of people eating sugar, they would picture something like a kid bouncing off the walls or someone laying on the ground with a big full stomach and spirals in their eyes because they ate too much. There are also people who believe that sugar is an addictive substance that is just plain bad for you. Often times this results in people trying to avoid sugar as much as possible or cutting it out of their diet completely. Though sugar can have some negative effects on the body if consumed in too large quantities, it truly isn't as evil as many make it out to be. In "Facts About Sugar and Sugar Substitutes" from John Hopkins Medicine, (n.d.), states that, "Sugar isn't inherently bad. Actually, it's necessary: Our bodies run on sugar." Despite many arisen myths, research has shown that there is no direct link between sugar and many of the pessimistic things it is accused of being associated with. Because of the lack of evidence, it cannot be assumed that sugar is associated with hyperactivity, diabetes, or addiction. Similarly, sugar is not bad for you and should not be cut out of your daily diet.

So then, why is it that so many people believe that sugar is bad for them? One of the biggest and possibly earliest myths of sugar intake is that it causes hyperactivity, especially in young children. In the article "Sugar: Does it Really Cause Hyperactivity?" From eatright.org, Karen Ansel and Esther Ellis (2022) state that "The sugar-hyperactivity myth is based on a single study from the mid 1970's in which a doctor removed the sugar from one child's diet and that child's behavior improved." This shows the origin of sugar myths as they are now. After hearing

that sugar causes change in behavior, other experiments were conducted where parents were found more likely to say that their children's behavior changed after eating sugar, even when their children weren't actually given any sugar. This brings light to the possibility that the myths surrounding sugars' negative effects, are nothing more than a placebo, just as they were in that experiment.

Still, many people today continue to believe that sugar is a large cause of hyperactivity. In the article "Is sugar making my child hyper?" From *Loma Linda University Health*, Lindsey Crumley (2022) states, "Kanchwala [A general pediatrics specialist at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital] says a large part of this myth comes from the power of our own minds. If we go into a situation expecting a certain outcome, we will likely see that outcome." Here she speaks to the idea that the myth comes from a strong placebo effect. If you were to walk around at a fair or carnival, it's likely that you would hear at least one child who just ate a bunch of candy say, "I have so much energy now." This is why the myth keeps moving forward without dying off. Growing up children hear their parents say that if they keep eating sugar they won't sleep, or they will have too much energy. Additionally, many people will say that they feel a rush after eating sugar. This is caused by a spike in blood sugar, leaving a short-lived energetic feeling, which truthfully does not last very long at all. The thing about children is that they are easily influenced and prone to believing what their authority figures tell them is true. Children then eat candy using it to become more 'energized' giving them an excuse to act out, because why not? They are children. When in reality, they may just be excited because they are at a fair.

Another common myth surrounding sugar and its negative effects, is that sugar causes type 2 diabetes. One of the main reasons people believe that eating sugar causes type 2 diabetes, is highlighted in the article "8 diabetes myths you shouldn't believe" from the *British Heart*

Foundation, (2019), that says, “The chances of developing this type of diabetes are greater if you are overweight or obese. A high-sugar diet is often a high-calorie diet, and too many calories can lead to weight gain.” So, sugar can cause weight gain, which may contribute to diabetes in the long run. However, sugar itself does not directly cause diabetes. In the article “The Sweet Deception: Debunking the Myth of Sugar” from *Northern Arizona University*, Dawn (2023) says, “It’s important to consider factors such as food insecurity, poverty and lack of access to healthcare, which are also factors that increase risk for type 2 diabetes.” A lot of people forget that the true culprit behind diabetes is the dietary choices the individual makes, as well as the availability of healthcare and economic situations the individual has access to. But maybe it’s just easier to shorten all of that to one word, “sugar.”

Since there are so many people who claim sugar to be the reason that they are gaining weight and developing health problems, the question ‘Is sugar addictive?’ surely comes to mind. Why else would so many people continue to eat it even when it is bad for them. The article “Is sugar addictive?” From *The Harvard Gazette* (2025) states, “Sugar has been shown to increase cravings and compulsive eating behaviors.” However, it is still not classified as an addictive substance, this is because unlike other addictions such as alcohol or drugs, sugar cannot be completely removed from our diet. It’s necessary to eat fruits such as bananas and apples to get other nutrients, vitamins, and fibers. There are natural sugars in these things also and to stop eating them to cut out sugar would have its own negative effects on the body.

The beliefs that sugar is addictive, causes hyperactivity, and diabetes lead to a wider myth that all sugar is bad for you. With the assumption that sugar causes all these other issues, many people are quick to cut as much sugar as possible out of their diet. However, this is not the correct solution, and all sugar is not the same. There are multiple types of sugars, two of which being natural and added sugars. This is where most of the confusion about whether sugar is bad

for you or not takes place. In the article “Understanding Natural Versus Added Sugars” from *Clear, (2021)*, it speaks about how getting your sugar from natural sources like bananas and apples will satisfy your body’s need for sugar. They help keep your metabolism stable over time and are processed slower. Natural sugar is actually beneficial to your health and by getting your sugar from natural sources you also get the other good fibers and vitamins that come along with it. Then there are added sugars. In the article “The bitter truth about added sugars” From *Harvard Health Publishing (2023)* states that “There's consistent evidence that all that excessive added sugar intake is a significant threat to one's health.” The real threat is not the sugars that are naturally occurring, it is the sugars that are human made. Though they are still considered sugar, added sugars are not real sugar and should not be classified as such. Added sugars can contribute to various health issues, but even then, it’s all about moderation. As long as sugar intake is being monitored, no one should have anything to worry about.

Many of the myths surrounding sugar intake have some truth to them; most myths do. Sugar can cause hyperactivity, not because of the substance itself, but because of the intention behind it. Sugar doesn’t have a direct link to hyperactivity, but because people were told that it did, they believe that it does, causing a placebo effect. An excess amount of sugar, in the long run can lead to type 2 diabetes, but not the same way so many people think it does. Too much sugar has a direct link to weight gain, which is directly linked to diabetes. But if you eat sugar in the correct proportions, you have nothing to worry about. Sugar does increase cravings, but it’s not a true addictive because it is unable to be cut out of your diet, without increasing other health risks. Too much added sugar is definitely hard on the body, but all sugar is not bad. Natural sugars are actually necessary for the body to be able to function how it's supposed to. It's completely characteristic for people to believe these myths. Many people I know and myself have fallen victim to them time and time again. My aunt used to not let her kids eat any sugar or

candy at all because she claimed that they made her kids too hyper. She just didn't realize that by claiming that she was creating her own truth out of a mere myth. After reading this paper maybe now people's first thoughts when they think of sugar will be *fruits, moderation, and necessary*.

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