

Sugar Does So Many Terrible Things Beyond Making You Fat

 thrillist.com/health/nation/what-eating-too-much-sugar-does-to-your-body

Amy Schlinger

6/1/2016



Chona Kasinger/Thrillist

This number represents how hot an article is at any given time.

Sugar is more like a legal drug than you might think. It affects the addiction and reward pathways in the brain, and over time, having too much of it can affect your health and lead to illnesses like heart disease and diabetes, high cholesterol, and weight gain.

But the truth is that sugar does so much more damage than giving you pesky things like "a slight paunch" and "type 2 diabetes." "Technically, sugar is a sweet crystalline substance obtained from various plants," says Dr. Frank Lipman, author of the *New York Times* best-seller, *The New Health Rules*, and creator of the [Be Well cleanse](#). "But my definition is that sugar is the devil."

The devil, huh? Strong words! Here are some of the other evils brought by those little white crystals.

Sugar screws up genes in your brain

Scientists [recently found](#) that diets high in fructose, a sugar especially common in the processed foods Americans hold dear (think high-*fructose* corn syrup) can alter genes in your brain. "Alter" is a generous term, though; eating too much sugar can damage these genes, which may lead to a whole host of diseases from depression to ADD to

Parkinson's. So in order to keep yourself sharp, stay away from the sweet stuff.

It freaks out your hormones

When you have too much sugar, you end up having a sugar crash. And news flash: that puts a lot of stress on your hormones. Why? Not only is the [hormone insulin responsible](#) for dealing with the sugar you're eating, but "your adrenal glands need to kick in and release cortisol, a steroid-like substance, to help lift you back up," explains Dr. Lipman. "Over time, your adrenal glands exhaust themselves trying to regulate your fluctuating sugar levels."

It's bad for your sperm

That's right, fellas: sugar is no good for your swimmers. Guys who drink more sugar-sweetened beverages, like sodas, [have lower sperm motility](#) than those who limit their intake. It's a pretty direct relationship, too: as the drinks went up, the sperm motility went down. Translation: the less soda or sugary drinks, the healthier your sperm will be. That should be reason enough, right?



gpointstudio/Shutterstock

It gives you gross skin

Noticing a lot of pimples on your skin lately? There's a [pretty strong link](#) between both sugar and dairy, and the appearance of acne. Ice cream is the worst thing for your face, in other words.

Sweets can also affect your skin's elasticity, adds Dr. Lipman. "Sugar binds to proteins and fats in the body during digestion to create 'advanced glycosylation endproducts' or AGES," he says. "These are free radicals that reduce collagen and elastin in the skin, ultimately causing wrinkles and loss of skin elasticity." Keep your face looking fresh

by staying away from the sugar.

It downgrades your immune system

Dr. Lipman [points to a study](#) showing that eating too much sugar may mean you won't make it through another winter. OK, that's a tad dramatic, but sugar does make it harder for your body to fight off infection "through decreasing activity in immune system cells that attack bacteria," he says. So if you seem to be catching every bug that crosses your path, reexamine your diet plan.

It makes you incapable of self-control

Look, the whole "sugar is a like a drug" isn't just a hyperbolic simile. After a while, your brain becomes obsessed with the natural opioids, or "natural high," that comes with eating a lot of sugar. "A diet loaded with sugar can generate excessive reward signals in the brain which can override one's self-control and lead to addiction," says Dr. Lipman.

It gets worse: 94% of lab rats given the choice between sweetened water (with saccharin and sugar) and intravenous cocaine chose sugar. And even when researchers upped the dosage of cocaine, the rats still chose the water... which is scary, especially because the rats preferred the sweetened water *even when they were high on cocaine*.

Obviously you're not going to wind up in the hospital after downing a liter of cola, but over time, you may be screwing up your body in ways you didn't realize, and that could cause a whole mess of long-term health issues. So try to cut back your intake now -- it may not be literal cocaine, but sugar sure does look a lot like it.

[Sign up here](#) for our daily *Thrillist* email, and get your fix of the best in food/drink/fun.

[Amy Schlinger](#) is a fitness and health editor in New York City, who is now questioning her love of Sour Patch Watermelons. Follow her to her next workout at [@aschlingg](#).

Published on 6/3/2016