



December 18, 2010 – Grand Rapids, MI

Sugar

Let's face it: we're hooked on sugar in North America, and the holiday season really brings out the sugary treats. Candy, Christmas cookies, and egg nog have plenty of sugar in them. As a treat, I think they're great. Paula and I are baking cookies this weekend, and I make a really great peanut brittle. But here's the problem: if we eat and drink too many sugary treats—not just now, but throughout the year—that sweet tooth has very real consequences. Let's take a look at a couple of studies.

Research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* shows that our consumption of sugars has increased from 10% to almost 16% of our daily calories over the past 30 years (1). For most people, a lot of that increase comes from sugar-laden drinks such as soda, but that's not the only source, of course. The increased sugar intake has health consequences for our bodies as I wrote about in the April 24 message, Sugar and Salt (http://drchet.com/pdf/2010pdf_Messages/04-2010pdf/04-24-2010--Sugar_and_Salt.pdf): higher sugar intake resulted in higher blood lipids, including triglycerides, but lower HDL-cholesterol levels—that's the good cholesterol.

The extra calories we're taking in add pounds. That's why over 70% of Americans are overweight. That's not all. In another article recently published in JAMA, there was a relationship between sugar intake, especially from soft drinks, and gout (2). In a large group of female subjects, researchers checked the relationship between fructose and gout—literally, a pain in the joints, and from everything I've read, it's a really excruciating pain. The researchers focused on who was drinking drinks with sugar compared to those who drank sugar-free drinks. The researchers found that drinking just one sugary drink per day increased the risk of getting gout by 75%. If a woman drank more than two sugary drinks per day, it increased the risk 1.5 times! On the other hand, if a woman drank sugar-free drinks, there was no increase in the risk of gout. While the risk of developing gout is low to begin with, increasing the risk by drinking sugary sodas is just asking for trouble. Add to that all the other sugary pastries, candy, and many other foods that contain sugars, and we're just asking for trouble.

The Bottom Line

The holiday season is a time of rejoicing and celebrating with family, friends, and co-workers. Every event from the office Christmas party to Christmas dinner usually results in some foods that we eat only at this time of year. That's fine as long as we keep things in perspective. Enjoy some of the treats and then it's over for the year. That's one way to avoid gaining the holiday seven—and maybe starting habits that will continue throughout the year. One thing is for sure: too much refined sugar can be a bad thing.

What are you prepared to do today?™

Dr. Chet

References:

1. JAMA, 2010;303(15): 1490-1497.
2. JAMA. 2010;304(20):2270-2278.

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