

new you

Oh, Sugar!

Is it a crime to down a glass of OJ? You might well wonder given the bad rap that sugar (yes, the natural kind too!) is currently getting from best-selling books, diet gurus, and even mainstream doctors. We ask experts to share what the real problems are (ab fat, anyone?) and the smartest ways to cut back

Are You Addicted TO SWEETS?

Take this quiz to see if you're hooked. Answer **TRUE** or **FALSE** for each question.

- 1** I crave something sweet after nearly every meal.
- 2** I have at least one soft drink (diet or regular) a day.
- 3** When I see something sweet, I have trouble passing it up.
- 4** I almost always have some sort of chocolate or candy every day.
- 5** I sometimes feel out of control when eating sweets.

If you answered **TRUE TO THREE OR MORE** questions, you're under sugar's spell, and it might be time to start curbing your intake, according to Foodtrainers nutritionist Lauren Slayton.

WHAT'S SO BAD?

IT CAN ADD BELLY BULGE

After years of saying that calories are the only thing that counts, experts now say *what* you eat matters too. Sugary foods are rapidly absorbed, precipitating insulin spikes that cause rebound hunger and elevated triglyceride levels [increasing your risk of heart disease], says family physician Mark Hyman, author of *The Blood Sugar Solution*. Scarier still, surplus fructose can build fat deep in the abdomen, which is the worst place in terms of health risks, says registered dietitian Janis Jibrin of wellness site Thebestlife.com.

IT LEAVES YOU WITH A HANGOVER

High-sugar foods might give you a burst of energy, but you may crash later, feeling more sluggish and out-of-it than before, says New York nutritionist Keri Glassman. By contrast, meals that have a balance of fiber, fat, and protein can temper the blood-sugar roller coaster that often leaves you glazed and confused.

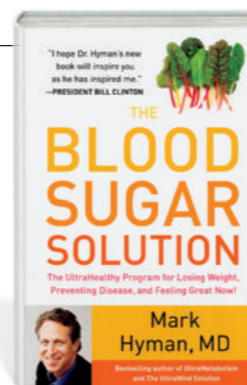
IT AGES YOU

Excess sugar in your diet can trigger the formation of advanced glycation end-products (known by the apt acronym AGEs), which can cause premature lines and wrinkles, says Dr. Hyman. But just because you're reducing consumption doesn't mean you have to be stingy with the sugar-based products you apply to your skin. Sugar actually works well as a topical exfoliant, gently sloughing off dead layers to reveal smoother, brighter skin.

In the 1950s the average American consumed about 109 pounds of sugar per year. By 2000 that number had risen to

152 POUNDS

Source: USDA



SUGAR GETS BUSTED

Since its publication in February, *The Blood Sugar Solution* (Little, Brown, \$28; amazon.com) has been generating a buzz, landing on the best-seller list for a dozen weeks (as this issue goes to press). Followers of Dr. Hyman's no-added-sugars edict are staving off what he calls "diabesity," a cluster of symptoms that can lead to serious health issues.

Artificial sweeteners can play tricks with your brain—and your body.



DON'T BE A FAKER

So why not just grab a diet drink, right? Turns out, satisfying your cravings with artificial substitutes isn't a smart swap, says Glassman. Though they don't know the cause, researchers have found that people who drink diet sodas are more likely to gain weight. One possible explanation? The faux stuff primes your palate to crave sweets, making it harder to scale back, says NYU nutrition professor Lisa Young.



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Slashing Sugar MADE SIMPLE

Try these easy strategies to slowly step away from sweets—without sacrificing taste or satiety



LEAVE NO ROOM

Instead of vowing to shun all sugary substances, “squeeze them out of your diet by adding more of the good things we all need,” says Ansel, “so there’s less room for the bad.” You can also find a sweet spot naturally with fiber-rich produce such as beets, bell peppers, fresh cherry tomatoes, or baked sweet potatoes sprinkled with cinnamon.



BEWARE OF BREAKFAST CEREALS

Even the seemingly wholesome varieties can be laden with the white stuff. A serving of Kashi Go Lean Crunch has a whopping 13 grams of sugar. “The ideal bowl,” says Young, author of *The Portion Teller Plan*, “should have more than 3 grams of fiber and fewer than 3 grams of sugar.” A safe bet: Cheerios.

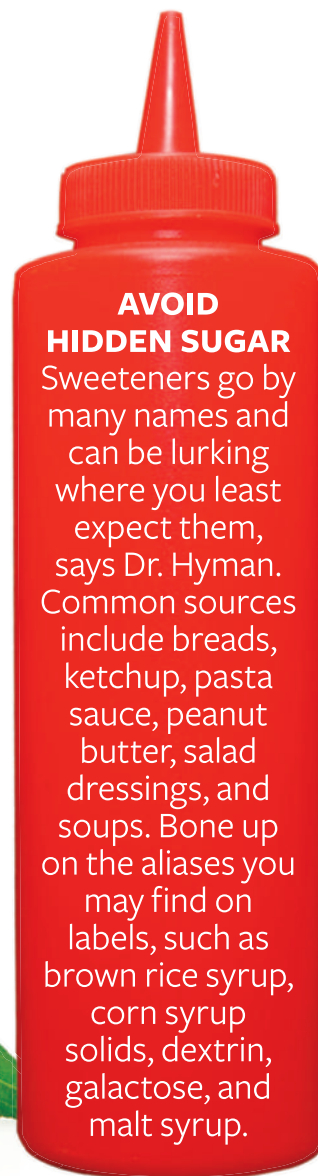
DON'T SKIMP ON LEAN PROTEIN

Foods like meat, fish, and nuts are digested slowly, which can help stabilize blood sugar and keep you fuller longer so you're less likely to have cravings, says nutritionist Karen Ansel of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Watch out for energy bars and shakes—they're often loaded with sugar. Instead, go for lean protein, such as turkey, grilled chicken, fish, and plain low-fat Greek yogurt.



SIP SMARTER

At first glance, juice may seem health-savvy—witness the ubiquity of the juice-cleanse craze. Most fruit juices are high in sugar, says Jibrin. Your best bet? Eat the whole fruit. It's more filling for fewer calories. Next best: Dilute your juice with increasing amounts of water or seltzer, says Jibrin, until it's nearly clear.



AVOID HIDDEN SUGAR

Sweeteners go by many names and can be lurking where you least expect them, says Dr. Hyman. Common sources include breads, ketchup, pasta sauce, peanut butter, salad dressings, and soups. Bone up on the aliases you may find on labels, such as brown rice syrup, corn syrup solids, dextrin, galactose, and malt syrup.

PICK THE FINEST FRUIT

Few dietitians advise cutting out fruit entirely since it has fiber along with natural sugars. “You don't get fat on fruit,” says Young. Focus on low-sugar, high-fiber, and phytonutrient-rich choices like blueberries and peaches over super-sweet fruits like pineapple, she says.

