



Are Hidden Sugars Sabotaging Your Health-Conscious Parenting Style?

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In a time when the low-fat diets have not made a dent in the high prevalence of childhood obesity, juvenile diabetes and the overall poor health of Americans, we have just started to turn our attention to SUGAR, something that has been quietly lurking around for so many years. Education! Education! Education! We are at the cusp of a dietary revolution, and as consumers of health products, medical insurance and food, are now better able to make informed decisions. We are starting to question why our health is so poor compared to other countries and how we can take control of it on an individual basis.

Everyone is trying to jump on the “natural” bandwagon and it can be quite confusing to say the very least. My job for the past two years has been to educate consumers and practitioners to make better choices about their health and sort through all the jargon, claims and so-called research.

“Ways Sugar Can Ruin Your Health”

In addition to throwing off the body's homeostasis, excess sugar may result in a number of other significant consequences. The following is an excerpt of Nancy Appleton's Book, [Lick the Sugar Habit](#), that lists 76 of sugar's metabolic consequences that have been compiled from a variety of medical journals and other scientific publications.

- Suppress your immune system and impair your defenses against infectious disease
- Can cause a rapid rise of adrenaline, hyperactivity, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and crankiness in children.
- Can produce a significant rise in total cholesterol, triglycerides and bad cholesterol and decrease good cholesterol
- Feeds cancer cells and has been connected with the development of cancer of the breast, ovaries, prostate, rectum, pancreas, biliary tract, lung, gallbladder and stomach
- Can cause autoimmune diseases such as: arthritis, asthma, multiple sclerosis
- Can cause a decrease in your insulin sensitivity, causing abnormally high insulin levels and eventually diabetes
- Can increase your systolic blood pressure
- Can cause drowsiness and decreased activity in children
- Can interfere with your absorption of protein
- Causes food allergies
- Can cause toxemia during pregnancy
- Can contribute to eczema in children
- Can reduce learning capacity, adversely affecting school children's grades and can cause learning disorders
- Can cause depression
- Is an addictive substance
- Can worsen the symptoms of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Sugar 101– not all sugars are “equal”

The best place to start is a crash course on the many names and forms of sugar. [Read Those Labels](#): Check products that claim to be sugar-free, natural or “Light”, because they often have more grams of sugar or empty calories than the original product. Ingredients listed below have a substantial effect on blood sugar and contain many calories without much benefit.

	Sugar (Grams)	Protein (Grams)	Serving Size	Calories
Starbucks Hot Chocolate, 2%, Whipped, Grande	40	14	16 oz	370
Starbucks, White Hot Choc, 2 % Grande, Whipped	62	16	16 oz	490
Starbucks Apple Juice, Grande	57	0	16 oz	250
Welch's Berries	12	1	.9 oz	80
General Mills Fruit by the Foot	10	0	.75 oz	80
Kellogs Nutri-Grain Apple Cinnamon Cereal Bar	13	1	1.3 oz	140
Dole Mandarin Oranges-sugar added	18	0	1 container	80
Nature's Oath Organic Frosted Blueberry Toaster Pastry	20	2	1 Pastry	200

Evaporated cane sugar • Raw or Turbinado sugar • Sucrose, rice, barley or maple syrup • Molasses • Dextrose • High fructose corn syrup • Brown sugar • Added Fructose

What are the alternatives and how do they compare?

Stevia

- **Pros** Our bodies can't metabolize Stevia, so it has no calories and doesn't raise blood sugar. Some studies show it has antiseptic and antimicrobial properties.
- **Cons** Stevia has been reviewed but not approved as a food additive by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Health Canada, the European Union and the World Health Organization. The FDA has OK'd it as a dietary supplement but not as a sweetener. Stevia proponents say the lack of approval is because there have been few human studies conducted on the sweetener.

Agave nectar

This honey-like substance is most frequently harvested from Agave plants in Mexico.

- **Pros** Is frequently certified organic, and is less viscous than honey, with a lower Glycemic index rating.
- **Cons** Has 60 calories and 16 grams of carbohydrates per tablespoon, according to Lyons, Colorado-based Madhava Honey, which sells organic Agave nectar. Some products marketed as Agave nectar are actually high-fructose corn syrup, says Russ Bianchi, chief executive of Adept Solutions, a global product-development company headquartered in Monterey, Calif.

Sugar alcohols

Also known as xylitol, mannitol, maltitol, sorbitol and erythritol, these sweeteners frequently show up in low-carb products and sugar-free candies, mints and gum. They are naturally occurring in many fruits and vegetables and can be commercially produced by adding hydrogen to glucose, fructose, sucrose or maltose.

- **Pros** Sugar alcohols are famous for not causing cavities and Xylitol has been shown in clinical and field studies to actually reduce plaque and cavities by not allowing bacteria to adhere to teeth and tissues. The tooth decay prevention claim is FDA-approved. Xylitol may have positive effects on ear/sinus infections because of the anti-bacterial effects, as well. Some pharmacies carry a line of Xylitol washes and products. Sugar alcohols don't raise blood sugar as rapidly as those ending in "oses," (Sucralose, Dextrose, etc) but have the same bulk.
- **Cons** They're low-cal but not no-cal. Also, because sugar alcohols are only partially digested and metabolized, they can cause digestive problems such as flatulence, bloating and diarrhea. Slowly introduce into diet or use Erythritol which has less of these side effects. It can be purchased online or at Whole Foods, and tastes great. You can look for a line of pastries called The Bite Sized Gourmet at Central Market.

Aspartame

Marketed under the brand names Equal and NutraSweet, aspartame is produced by combining two amino acids and methanol. The resulting powder is 180 times as sweet as sugar.

- **Pros** Low Glycemic and low calorie. According to the University of Nebraska's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, because aspartame is made of amino acids, it provides the same energy as any protein—4 calories per gram. It's also FDA-approved and used in more than 5,000 commercial products.
- **Cons** Aspartame is highly controversial in the natural foods community. The University of Nebraska reports there have been more than 6,000 unsolicited complaints to the FDA concerning aspartame, and the Centers for Disease Control notes that some people may have unusual sensitivity to the sweetener. Common complaints include neurological issues, headaches, seizures and brain tumors, although the FDA says it hasn't found any connection between aspartame and brain tumors. However, National Cancer Institute data indicate a significant increase in the frequency and severity of brain tumors reported since aspartame was introduced in the early 1980s. I personally do not recommend this alternative.

Splenda/Sucralose

Made by combining sucrose with chlorine, sucralose is 600 times sweeter than table sugar. It's marketed under the brand name Splenda.

- **Pros** Sucralose is not absorbed into the body and thus has no calories and is low-Glycemic. It was approved by the FDA in 1998, and is endorsed by the Atkins Institute. As of 1999, it's on the Center for Science in the Public Interest's "safe" list of food additives. Because sucralose's consistency is close to sugar, it's good for baking or cooking.
- **Cons** Because sucralose is a relatively new product, some believe it hasn't been adequately tested. Newer research indicates it may have negative side effects. It may be derived from natural substances but the processing of it is not.

Honey

Naturally occurring, very dense source of carbs, antimicrobial effects when used topically, used for soar throats with lemon.

- **Pros** helpful for allergy sufferers, has some minerals and B vitamins
- **Cons** Does have Glycemic index of 55 and should not be used for people wanting to keep insulin levels low. Use in moderation.

What can you do?

- Share information with fellow parents, teachers care givers and family about sugar.
- Make your wishes about sugar and your children known to caregivers and family.
- Make agreements with other parents or teacher that everyone refrains from bringing sugary foods to schools for special occasions. The children will perform better, be less moody and their teacher will thank you. After all, when the kids crash from birthday cupcakes it is usually the teacher that has to deal with it.
- Invest some time on the weekend to have ready-made healthy snacks on hand during the week.
- Don't cave into sugar pressure. You know sugar is not healthy for your child and you may not be popular but in the long run it is best for them.
- Discuss the negative effects of sugar on their bodies.
- Set an example (at least around your children until you are ready to tackle your sugar addictions).
- Advocate taking soda machines out of schools.
- Do not have sugary items in the house. Yes, easier said than done.

"In a report published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 100 grams of sugar from glucose, fructose, sucrose, honey or orange juice caused a significant decrease in the ability of white blood cells to engulf and destroy bacteria. This decrease in immune function was still present five hours after sugar was consumed."

Sanchez, A, et al. Role of sugars in human neutrophilic phagocytosis. Am J Clin Nutr 1973;26:180.



Continue your sugar education:

For adults, sugar imbalances and addictions in adults usually stems from a hard to diagnose endocrine problem that may include female issues, the adrenals, thyroid, pituitary, hypothalamus, etc.

Suggested Reading: Why Can't I lose Weight, Lorrie Medford, CN; Adrenal Fatigue, The 21st Century Stress Syndrome, James Wilson, ND, DC, PhD

Research Gymnema- caution when using with other blood sugar drugs and herbs. Never change your prescription without your doctor's advice. Instead consult a trained herbalist/nutritionist and have them work together to monitor your Blood Sugar closely. Also, there is NO magic pill to balance sugar without looking at the underlying issues, usually endocrine and lifestyle. Gymnema is completely dose and quality dependent. Each person benefits differently at different doses.

Suggested Reading/Websites:

- Lick the Sugar Habit, Nancy Appleton, PhD.
- The Complete Idiot's Guide to Glycemic Index/Weight Loss, Beale and Clark
- The Glycemic Revolution Series, Latest Additions
- The Zone Collection, Barry Sears, PhD. Contains 3 books in one: A Week in the Zone, Mastering the Zone and Zone Perfect Meals in Minutes. (Although I do not agree with his use of soy and a few other suggestions he has the right idea)
- Little Sugar Addicts: End the Mood Swings, Meltdowns, Tantrums, and Low Self-Esteem in Your Child Today, Kathleen Demaisons, PhD
- <http://macrobiotics.co.uk/sugar.htm>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erythritol>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aspartame>
- <http://www.ifnh.org/index.html>
- http://www.westonaprice.org/splash_2.htm

About the Author: Tina Pepi has been personally interested in Nutrition and Health for the last 15 years. She has earned a certification in Applied Clinical Nutrition as well as worked as a representative for a 79 year old whole food nutritional company. Her primary concern in that position was education of less invasive and toxic forms of nutrition to support clients of doctors, massage therapist, chiropractors, nurses and naturopaths. She currently lives in Austin and has a private business where she consults and develops customized nutrition plan for the entire family, as well as, speaks publicly on nutrition. For more information please call 512.417.8931 or email healthylegacy@yahoo.com