

Who Can Say No to This?

Sugar is nearly impossible to resist—and you're probably eating more of it than you think.

By MICHELLE CROUCH

It's an hour before dinner, and you shouldn't spoil your appetite, but you have a craving for something sweet. You rummage through the fridge and kitchen cabinets, until—bingo!—you come upon a package of chocolate cookies. Your mouth is already watering.

"I'll have just one," you think.

"And another ..."

"And maybe a couple more ..."

In no time, you've devoured half the package.

You may blame your sweet tooth. Or your lack of willpower. But that's only part of the story.

Neuroscientist Eric Stice took pictures of teenagers' brains while they consumed soda and other sugary treats. He found that sugar-sweetened foods lit up the "reward center" of their brains, giving them a happy, pleasurable feeling that made it difficult to stop eating. "The more sugar you eat, the more you want it," Stice says.





● YOUR NUTRITION

But here's the tricky thing: Steering clear of eating too much sugar isn't as simple as resisting those extra Oreos. That's because food manufacturers have added sugars to a whopping 74 percent of the packaged food items in your supermarket. Often, the sweet stuff is in foods you don't expect, like crackers, deli meats, salad dressing, "healthy" flavored yogurts, and even whole wheat bread.

Food manufacturers do it to make foods taste better. They do it to keep you coming back for more. And they do it even though sugar may be messing with your health.

THE SUGAR CREEP

Today, Americans, on average, each eat 57 pounds of sugar a year—but it wasn't always that way. It's not that people in, say, the 1800s didn't have a taste for sweets—humans have craved

ripe, sugar-rich fruits since the caveman days—but the way they ate was far, far different. Early Americans had to make meals out of meats from animals they hunted and fresh fruits and veggies grown nearby. Dessert was usually dried fruits or homemade puddings sweetened with maple syrup or molasses.

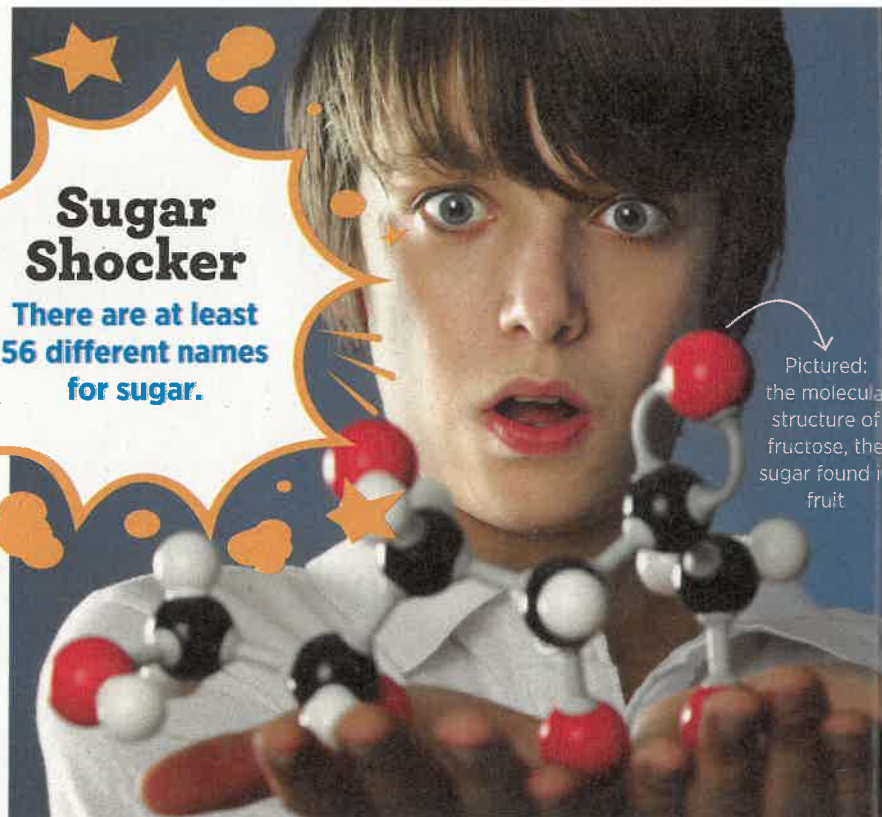
It wasn't until the early 1900s

that most Americans began to buy processed and packaged foods, like ready-to-eat cereal. And it was even later—in the 1940s—that food scientists began to understand how to make those foods even more delicious: by pumping them full of extra sugar.

But food manufacturers weren't just tucking the sweet

Sugar Shocker

There are at least 56 different names for sugar.



Pictured: the molecular structure of fructose, the sugar found in fruit

How Much Do You Really Know About Sugar?

TAKE THIS QUIZ TO FIND OUT.

1 You can always taste sugar in the food.

True ☐
False ☐

2 Which sweetener is healthier?

Honey ☐
White sugar ☐
No difference ☐

3 Candy gives you an energy boost.

True ☐
False ☐

4 The best way to eat less sugar is to cut back on:

Dessert ☐
Cereal ☐
Sweet drinks ☐

5 Which of these foods has natural sugars?

Broccoli ☐
Lemons ☐
Milk ☐
All of the above ☐

Answers: p. 14

● YOUR NUTRITION

stuff into those sneaky sources like cereal and bread. They also began mass-producing sugary sodas and snacks, making them easier to buy and consume.

So what's the big deal? Nutritionists call the sweeteners put in during the food production process *added sugars*, and they warn that these sugars affect our bodies differently than the natural sugars found in the fruits enjoyed by our ancient ancestors. When you eat an orange, for example, you're not only getting a rush of sweetness; you're also getting *fiber* and complex carbohydrates. It takes your body time to break down these *nutrients*, which means that the sugar gets released into your blood slowly. This process also keeps you fuller longer.

When you chug an orange

Sugar Shocker

You should eat no more than 6 teaspoons of sugar per day. Yet most teens consume 4 to 5 times that.

soda, on the other hand, you send a *concentrated* load of sugar straight to your liver. An overload of sugar can, over time, lead to obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.

THE BIG COVER-UP

How long have food manufacturers known about the dangers of sugar? That's a tricky question—with a troubling answer. The first studies linking sugar to health problems were completed in the 1960s, but

sugar companies didn't want that information to go public. They knew they would lose money if people knew how unhealthy sugar could be.

Recently, researchers from the University of San Francisco discovered old papers that showed the extreme steps these companies took to protect their profits. The documents showed that the Sugar Research Foundation, a group created to promote the sugar industry, hired scientists to do a different

How Did You Do?

CHECK YOUR QUIZ ANSWERS FROM PAGE 12.

- 1. FALSE!** Seventy-four percent of packaged foods have sugar in them, and they aren't all sweet. Items like bread and hot dogs have sugar as well. The best way to find out how much is by reading the label.
- 2. NO DIFFERENCE!** Sugar is sugar. Your body processes both sweeteners the same way once they hit your digestive system.
- 3. FALSE.** Sure, you might feel a temporary lift after eating candy—that's your blood sugar rising—but

then your blood sugar may crash, leaving you sluggish and sleepy.

- 4. SWEET DRINKS!** Beverages are the main sugar culprit in most teens' diets, so start there. For example, a Starbucks Caramel Frappuccino contains about 16 teaspoons of sugar.

- 5. ALL OF THE ABOVE!** Foods with natural sugars tend to have other essential nutrients that keep the body healthy and help prevent disease.

study. That study focused on the dangers of fat rather than sugar. It helped shape U.S. dietary recommendations for decades, and it prompted many Americans to focus on cutting back on fat instead of sweets.

"They put a tremendous amount of energy into trying to shape the scientific discussion," says Stanton Glantz, who co-authored a report on the old documents, "and they were able to move the focus away from sugar as a player in heart disease for 40 years."

SNEAKY TACTICS

Questionable science is just one of the tactics some food companies have up their sleeves. They also try to disguise sugar by sneaking it into foods under

different names, says Robert Lustig, author of *Fat Chance: Beating the Odds Against Sugar, Processed Food, Obesity, and Disease*. Lustig has counted 56 names for the hidden sweet stuff. Maybe you've heard of sucrose and high-fructose corn syrup. But how about agave nectar, rice syrup, and barley malt? They may sound healthier, but those are sugars too.

You can spot sugar on a product's ingredient list: The more of something that's in a food, the higher it's supposed to be on that list. But food companies do something else to fool you. To make it appear that a product doesn't have a lot of sugar, they often use smaller amounts of three or four different types of sugar.

"Different types of sugar may be number 5, 6, 7, and 8 on the ingredient list," Lustig says, "but when you add them up, it's the number 1 ingredient." Sneaky!

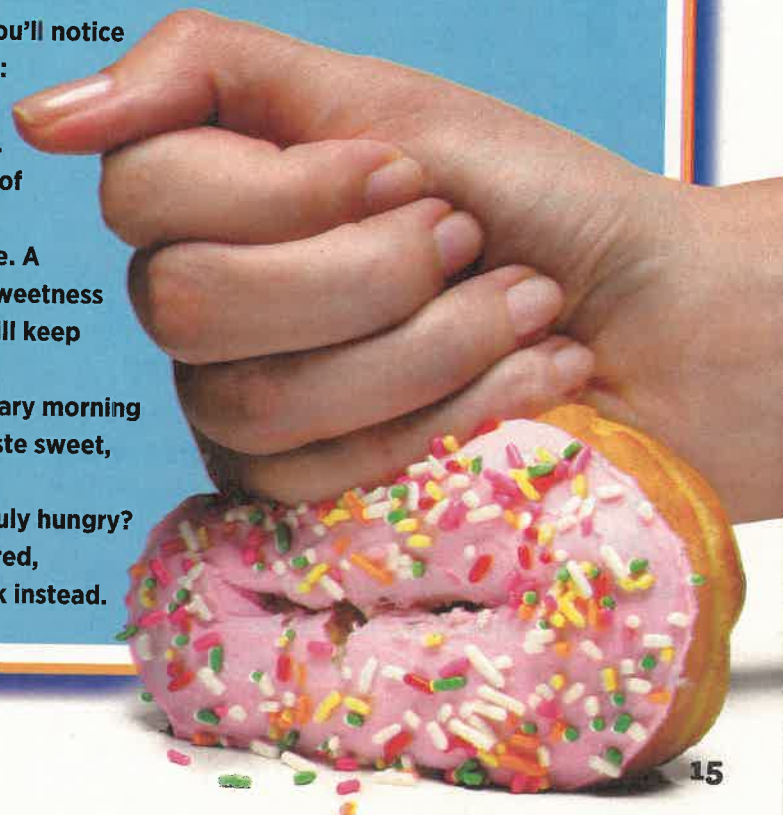
DON'T FREAK OUT

The good news? Sugar in moderate amounts is fine. In fact, we need sugar. It's an important energy source that should make up about 10 percent of our diet. But now that you're on to the industry's tricks, you can take steps to know what you're really eating and lower your intake. Maybe you cut out soda, or ask your mom to buy the peanut butter with less sugar. That will leave more room for a delicious, healthy meal—and a couple of Oreos too!

How to Tame Your Sweet Tooth

Always craving sweets? Cut back on sugar, and you'll notice that you need less sweetness to feel satisfied. Try:

- 1. SCALING BACK ON LIQUID SWEETS.** If you drink a soda every day, switch to every other day. Need something else to sip? Dilute a quarter-cup of fruit juice with sparkling water and ice.
- 2. GOING NATURAL.** Reach for an apple or orange. A whole piece of fruit not only has intense natural sweetness to nix your cravings, but it also has fiber, which will keep you full and satisfied.
- 3. SPLITTING THE DIFFERENCE.** Mix half your sugary morning cereal with half unsweetened cereal. It will still taste sweet, but have 50 percent less sugar.
- 4. CHECKING IN WITH YOUR HUNGER.** Are you truly hungry? Or are you reaching for sweets because you're bored, stressed, or tired? Text a friend or take a long walk instead.



Your Body on Sugar

After something sweet hits your tongue, here's where the excess sugar ends up and what it does.



YOUR TEETH

Almost 60 percent of teens have cavities, and experts say sugar is a major contributor. Turns out bacteria in your mouth love sugar just as much as you do. They feed on it and produce an acid that weakens tooth enamel.



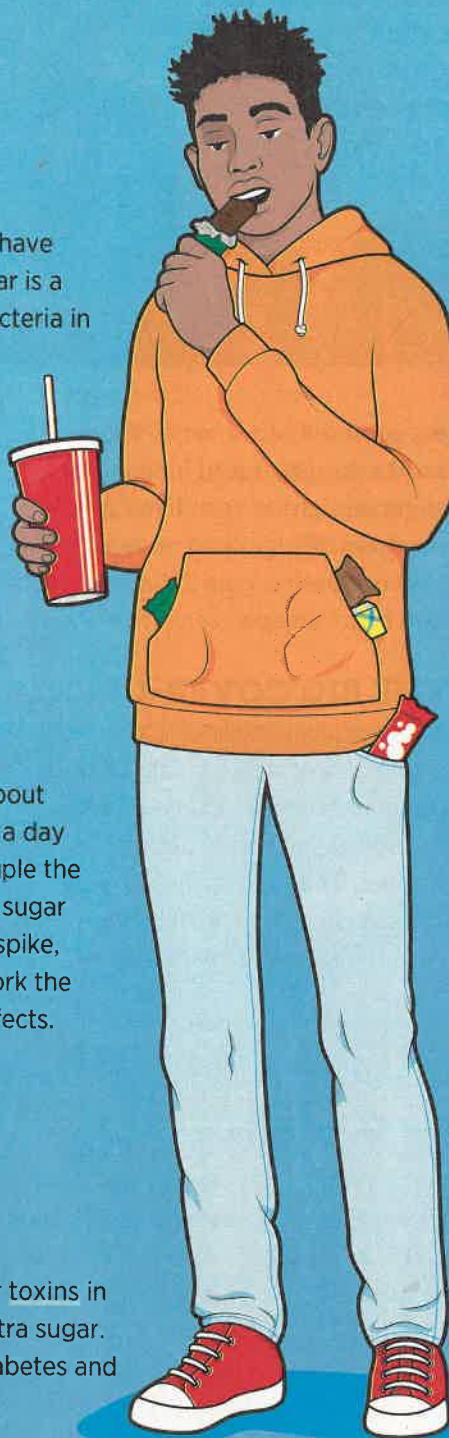
YOUR HEART

American teens consume about 28 teaspoons of added sugar a day on average—more than quadruple the recommended amount. Since sugar can cause blood pressure to spike, eating too much could overwork the heart and have long-term effects.



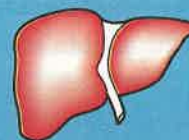
YOUR KIDNEYS

Kidneys work nonstop to filter toxins in the body, including all that extra sugar. Too much sugar can lead to diabetes and kidney damage.



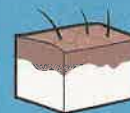
YOUR BRAIN

Sweets activate your reward system, which gives you a temporary boost. It's the brain's way of getting you to grab more. But too much sugar can cause cognitive problems and memory loss, according to recent studies.



YOUR LIVER

When you consume too much sugar for the liver to process and store, it converts the sugar into fat and sends it to your midsection.



YOUR SKIN

High sugar levels age your skin by messing up the way your body builds collagen and elastin—proteins that keep your skin looking young.