



## **BEAT THE SUGAR ADDICTION!** Jamie Weber RDN, CD, CLC

**"Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right"** is the theme for National Nutrition Month 2014. Consumer research confirms that taste tops nutrition as the main reason why one food is purchased over another. While social, emotional and health factors also play a role, the foods people enjoy are likely the ones they eat most. In saying this, I encourage you to be cautious of your sugar intake! Many of us enjoy the taste of sugar, but at what expense?

Over the past 300 years our sugar intake has drastically increased!

- In 1700, the average person consumed about 4 pounds of sugar per year.
- In 1800, the average person consumed about 18 pounds of sugar per year.
- In 1900, individual consumption had risen to 90 pounds of sugar per year.
- In 2009, more than 50 percent of all Americans consume one-half pound of sugar PER DAY—translating to a whopping 180 pounds of sugar per year!

Along with the increase in sugar in the diet, Americans' waistlines have been expanding. Two-thirds of Americans are either overweight or obese. Carrying excess weight increases your risk for conditions such as heart disease, kidney disease and diabetes. Could sugar be partly to blame? While some sugar in the diet is part of a balanced diet, an excess could lead to weight gain and variety of other health conditions. Anytime you have filled your body with more fuel (carbohydrates, protein & fat) than it actually needs, excess will be stored as fat. Excess sugar converted to fatty acids in the liver, is transported throughout the body and stored as fat, including, but not limited to, the popular regions of the stomach, hips and butt.

### **What are the Different Types of Sugars?**

All carbohydrates are not created equally. You've probably heard the term simple vs. complex carbohydrates.

**Simple Carbohydrates:** Simple sugars tend to be found in more of your baked goods, boxed cereal, table sugar, honey, fruits, chocolate, soda, etc. These are refined sugars that have very little nutritional value. These types of sugars will



have an immediate impact on elevating your blood sugars because of their chemical make-up. There are two types of simple carbohydrates: monosaccharides (fructose, galactose & glucose) and disaccharides (maltose & sucrose). Despite having little nutritional value, some foods that contain simple sugars may be beneficial for you in moderation, such as fruit and honey.

**Complex Carbohydrates:** Complex carbohydrates are made up of three or more sugars, oligosaccharides and polysaccharides. These sugars tend to be rich in fiber, vitamins and minerals; because of this, it takes longer to be broken down and will not cause the blood sugar to rise as rapidly as simple sugars. Complex carbohydrates tend to be found in most vegetables like spinach, kale, collard greens, yams, sweet potatoes, broccoli, and zucchini; and are also found in lentils, beans, whole grains (quinoa, brown rice, amaranth, etc.) and many other leguminous plants and vegetables. These types of carbohydrates will have a higher nutrient value and should be included as part of a balanced diet.

## How do I Balance My Sugar Intake?

- **Portion control.** One serving of grains is  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup, milk is 8oz, starchy veggies (corn, peas, potatoes, and winter squash) is  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup, and fruit is  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup or  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of dried fruit per serving. Try to limit these food choices to 3-4 per meal and 1-2 per snack. A dinner would look like the following: 1 cup brown rice w/non-starchy veggies (seasoned with herbs, garlic, etc.) and chicken with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruit and water. Or if you'd prefer to have milk you could forgo the fruit and have that as a snack. It's all about balance.
- **Protein.** Protein will help you stay fuller longer! Usually you can go 2-3 hours in between eating by consuming protein versus feeling hungry after an hour. Protein will help with weight loss/maintenance and blood sugar management. Try to add some protein at each meal and snack. An example of a well-balanced snack would be a small apple with peanut butter. Remember this tip when you head to your next get-together. Choose snacks with some protein. It will help fill you up and you won't be as likely to overdo the simple carbohydrates.
- **Choose Desserts Wisely.** Try to choose fruit as a dessert as much as possible. Fruit may satisfy that "sweet tooth" and provide vitamins, minerals, fiber and antioxidants! If you choose to have a sweet treat on special occasions, try not to indulge in these foods daily: pastries, cakes, cookies, etc. They tend to be high in sugar, trans-fats and loaded with preservatives and additives.



- **Choose Water.** Over ½ of our body is water and we need it in order for our organs to function optimally. Many times when we choose the higher sugared beverages (soda, juice or energy drinks) or water we are adding extra calories we don't need.

**Choose Natural Sweeteners.** If you need to sweeten something up, naturally occurring sweeteners are better than the alternative. Add stevia, honey, maple syrup, or concentrated fruit sugars to sweeten up oatmeal, plain Greek yogurt or beverages. These are primarily simple sugars so you want to limit portions to 1-2 teaspoons, if possible. Stevia is a natural, non-caloric sweetener that doesn't affect blood sugar. Stevia comes in both a powder and liquid. Keep the liquid in your purse to sweeten foods while on the go. If you bake, try substituting ½ the amount of powdered stevia for the sugar. If the recipe calls for 1 cup of sugar, use ½ cup stevia. You can find the powdered form at local food Co-ops and the liquid can be found either at the Co-Op or Woodman's. If substituting honey, try ¾ cup in place of 1 cup of sugar. You may need to reduce the other liquids in the recipe by half because honey is more liquid than sugar. Reducing the heat by 25 degrees will help prevent over-browning. Honey has a lower glycemic index and will not cause your blood sugar to spike as quickly as ingesting sugar. Honey (this includes raw and pasteurized) should not be fed to infants younger than 1 year old. This isn't about allergy as much as it is about food safety, and in particular, a type of bacteria known as *Clostridium*. This type of bacteria can contaminate honey and cause infant botulism, leading to muscle weakness. To reduce the risk of infant botulism, do not introduce honey or any honey-containing foods (i.e., honey graham crackers) until after baby's first birthday.

## My Challenge to YOU!

Try incorporating these changes to your diet for 2 weeks. Eat fresh foods, watch portions, add protein to all meals and snacks, add natural sweeteners if you need something sweetened and drink only water. Try to keep a journal and record your food intake, mood associated with eating the food and energy level. If you're used to eating a high sugar diet you may notice some fatigue, headaches, nausea, etc. the first 3-7 days, but after that you should notice enhanced energy and mood, you may also find it's easier to concentrate. Should you choose to take part in this challenge, email me your findings at [jweber@vmh.org](mailto:jweber@vmh.org).

