

Shed That Sweet Tooth

New health guidelines advise less sugar in our diets

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Body



PETER DAZELEY—GETTY IMAGES

The World Health Organization is advising people around the world to cut down on the amount of sugar they consume each day.

While sweet treats can be hard to resist, the World Health Organization (WHO) has set new dietary guidelines for people around the world. The guidelines, released on Wednesday, advise that both adults and children cut back on their sugar intake to stay healthy.

In a statement, Francesco Branca, director of the WHO's nutrition department, said there is "solid evidence" that reducing daily sugar intake "reduces the risk of overweight, obesity, and tooth decay."

Keep it Fresh

The guidelines do not apply to the sugars in fresh fruits and vegetables or those that are naturally present in milk. According to the WHO, there is no reported evidence of negative effects of consuming those sugars. Instead, the new guidelines focus on "added" or "free" sugars. These include sugars that are added to processed foods and drinks such as donuts, cookies, candy, and soft drinks.

Added sugars are sometimes described as "hidden" sugars because they exist in foods we might not think of as sweets, such as honey and ketchup. Health experts advise that consumers look at ingredients on food packages to help make better-informed decisions.

A Worldwide Concern

The WHO recommends that people in the United States, Europe, and other Western societies should cut their average sugar intake by about two-thirds, or down to just 10% of their overall calories. For developing countries, where dental care is less advanced and cavities are more difficult to prevent, the WHO recommends that sugar intake be reduced to 5%.

In the U.S., adults currently get about 11 to 15% of their calories from added sugars. Children typically consume even more, as it can account for up to 16% of their diets. In Europe, sugar intake varies by country. For adults in Hungary and Norway, it is about 7%. In Spain and the United Kingdom, sugar makes up as much as 17% of adults' diets. The WHO reports that for children in Europe, sugar intake can be much higher, ranging from about 12% in Denmark, Slovenia, and Sweden, to nearly 25% in Portugal.

“The trouble is, we really do like sugar in a lot of things,” said scientist Kieran Clarke, of the University of Oxford. “Even if you are not just eating lollies and candy, you are probably eating a fair amount of sugar.”

But Clarke also notes that for those people who can't shake their love for sweets, getting more exercise is a good solution. “If you get enough exercise, you can eat almost anything,” she said. “But it's very hard to avoid large amounts of sugar unless all you're eating is fruits and vegetables.”

Boo! It's Good For You

Being scared can be beneficial to your health

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Body



Today is Halloween, the holiday full of tricks and treats and all things frightening and fun. But what happens when you trade your sweets for a scare? The result is way healthier than candy.

The Positives of Fear

Being frightened can be good for you. Think about your favorite scary book or movie. What happens when something goes bump in the night, or a door creaks or slams, or glass shatters? It often makes us jump. This reaction is provoked by fear.

Fear makes your brain flood with healthy chemical substances that excite your mood and release feelings of euphoria, or great excitement. According to Dr. Margee Kerr, a sociologist who studies fear, this “powerful chemical punch” includes endorphins and dopamine—a natural compound in the body that creates feelings of happiness.

When you're spooked, your body also produces a chemical called oxytocin. This hormone helps people bond with one another. When people share the experience of being scared, it can make them feel closer. So, if you're at a haunted house with some pals, that experience can help solidify your friendship. “Watch people walking out of a haunted house, and you'll see lots of smiles and high fives,” Kerr says.

A Healthy Scare

There is also some evidence that being scared can help a person manage stressful situations. Things like giving a presentation in front of your class or performing in a school play can make us fearful and anxious. But these experiences help build a sort of endurance to fear that makes us more confident. “You become more comfortable with the physical experience of fear, and so you're better able to work through it during tense situations,” Kerr explains.

Though some haunting may be healthy, it's important to remember that people

experience fear in different ways. What may be fun for one person could be too scary for another. And Kerr notes that kids younger than six and or seven can't separate real and make-believe, so seeing something frightening could have lasting, negative effects.

But for most people who are old enough, a little "boo" now and then isn't so bad. In fact, it may be positively spook-tacular.