

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY



State of sugar

by CHARLOTTE MOERKERK on Jun 12, 2013 • 3:43 pm

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The sweet sacrifice of ageing

According to Robert Lustig, an American paediatric endocrinologist and childhood diabetes specialist, sugar consumption in Britain has increased by 31 per cent since 1990. The average person is now eating a half-kilo of sugar a week.

In the past 23 years, consumption of raw sugar has decreased, but the amount of hidden sugar intake has increased significantly.

Where it is hidden

Would you eat 7.5 sugar cubes at once? A Snickers bar contains just that much.

Fizzy drinks are even more sugary. Drinking a can of cola will put the equivalent of 9.5 cubes into your body. Dried fruits too are chock-full of sugar. A handful of cranberries contains about 6.5 cubes.

Even limited amounts of sugar are a concern to the health conscious person, but avoiding sugar outright is incredibly difficult. Jo Travers, a London-based nutritionist, acknowledges that sugar is ubiquitous in Western cuisine. "Even ready prepared savoury food contains plenty of refined sugar," she says.

Staying young

As difficult as going sugar-free may be, there is one group determined to try it, those who live in fear of ageing. New evidence shows that avoiding sugar may be necessary to prevent wrinkles.

According to Josette Lorient, a dermatologist, there is a significant relationship between sugar consumption and the development of wrinkles.

Lorient is also an expert on glycation, the damaging of cells and tissues in your body caused by sugars. When sugar enters the bloodstream, it attaches to collagen and elastin proteins that help preserve youthful appearance.

"[This causes] the collagen to be less elastic and more stiff, which shows as wrinkles on the skin surface. Without the supply of elastin, collagen loses its flexibility, which causes increasing difficulties for the skin to return to its original state. Hence, the relationship between sugar and skin ageing."

While many people may balk at the idea of cutting out all sugars from their diet, for those unwilling to make the sacrifice, hope is at hand.

What now?

Lorient recommends consuming high-fibre foods, because they slow down the digestion of carbohydrates, which include sugars, and help balance blood-sugar levels.

Instead of confectionary or cola, choose fruits and fibre.

Of course, looking young should not be the only reason to cut down on sugar. New medical studies have linked our ever-sweetening diet to many health problems, from heart disease, cancer, erectile dysfunction, diabetes and constipation.

Sweet facts:

Foods and drinks high in sugar are 15g per 100g

Foods and drinks low in sugar are 5g per 100g

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