

A Primer on Sugar Cravings

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The majority of my work is in helping people manage their blood sugar, the frequent complaint one of excess weight accompanied by sugar cravings. What people often don't realize is that the very food and drink they are choosing, including artificial sweeteners, contribute to the problem.

I use the following explanation quite a bit. It is oversimplified, but it gets the point across. Once my clients have some understanding of blood sugar basics and learn how to take back control - their life just gets easier.

The body has a very tight range in which it prefers sugar to be in the blood. When you eat something sweet, the tongue tastes the sweet and communicates with the brain that there are carbohydrates coming in. The brain then communicates with the pancreas to set the stage for the release of insulin.

Insulin's job is to get any excess sugar out of the blood. As a door monitor to the fat cells, insulin acts to remove the excess sugar out of the blood stream and into the fat cells. For this reason insulin is often called the fat storage hormone.

A morning that begins with only carbohydrates (toast, cereal, juice) spikes the body's blood sugar. The body goes on alert "the blood sugar is too high". Insulin is sent into action to bring the blood sugar back into acceptable range.

The outcome of the level of insulin that surges in response to a spike in the blood sugar can be a dramatic lowering of the blood sugar. What goes up must come down. The body now goes on a new alert "the blood sugar is too low".

Although eating a well balanced snack or meal at this point would seem the wise thing to do, it would take time to digest. The brain yells "NO, I need some glucose NOW!" It will drive us with a sugar craving to get something sweet and often caffeinated into our system quickly so as to bring the blood sugar back up.

Now the blood sugar is spiked again and the rollercoaster ride is on. We feel controlled by the sugar cravings, spending our day trying to micro-manage our blood sugar and the resulting mood and energy fluctuations.

Artificial sweeteners only serve to confuse the body's blood sugar mechanism. When you eat something made with an artificial sweetener, your tongue still tastes the sweet. With that sweet taste it tells the brain "hey, here comes some sugar". The brain conveys to the pancreas that there is sugar coming in and the pancreas releases insulin in response to that communiqué.

Although what you have eaten has few calories, your body responds otherwise

and sends out the insulin in response to what it thinks is a boatload of sugar coming in. The result of this insulin surge is that your blood sugar goes plummeting and you find yourself very hungry a few hours later. In one study, people who used artificial sweeteners ate up to three times the amount of calories in the long run as the control group.

This is only the blood sugar response. The chemical configuration of the artificial sweetener confounds the body. It is a toxin. If the body can't get rid of it, it tucks it away in the safest place it knows...fat cells. The body will often put on water weight as a buffer to the toxins that laden the body. One doctor tells the story of his patient losing 19 pounds just by getting rid of aspartame in their diet.

The way to climb off the rollercoaster ride of sugar cravings is to get your blood sugar onto a good start at the first of the day and keep it there. To do so - eat a balanced breakfast, a mid-morning snack, lunch, an afternoon snack and then dinner. Include quality proteins, carbs and fat with each meal and snack, leaving out the fake reduced-calorie options. Cravings will disappear and your weight will easily shift for the better. You will once again become the master of your ship. The freedom in that is worth the effort.