

# ABA Chronicle

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## Sweet Stuff How Sugars Affect Your Health

Most of us love sweet foods and drinks. But after that short burst of sweetness, you may worry about how sweets affect your waistline and your overall health. Is sugar really bad for us? How about artificial or low-calorie sweeteners? What have scientists learned about the sweet things that most of us eat and drink every day?

Our bodies need one type of sugar, called glucose, to survive. “Glucose is the number one food for the brain, and it’s an extremely important source of fuel throughout the body,” says Dr. Kristina Rother, an NIH pediatrician and expert on sweeteners. But there’s no need to add glucose to your diet, because your body can make the glucose it needs by breaking down food molecules like carbohydrates, proteins, and fats.

Some sugars are found naturally in foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and milk. “These are healthful additions to your diet,” says Dr. Andrew Bremer, a pediatrician and NIH expert on sweeteners. “When you eat an orange, for instance, you’re getting a lot of nutrients and dietary fiber along with the natural sugars.”

Although sugar itself isn’t bad, says Rother, “sugar has a bad reputation that’s mostly deserved because we consume too much of it. It’s now in just about every food we eat.”

Experts agree that Americans eat and drink way too much sugar, and it’s contributing to the obesity epidemic. Much of the sugar we eat isn’t found naturally in food but is added during processing or preparation.



About 15% of the calories in the American adult diet come from added sugars. That’s about 22 teaspoons of added sugar a day. Sugars are usually added to make foods and drinks taste better. But such foods can be high in calories and offer none of the healthful benefits of fruits and other naturally sweet foods.

Sugar-sweetened beverages like soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks are the leading source of added sugars in the American diet. Juices naturally contain a lot of sugar. But sometimes, even more is added to make them taste sweeter.

“Juices offer some vitamins and other nutrients, but I think those benefits are greatly offset by the harmful effects of too much sugar,” says Bremer.

Over time, excess sweeteners can take a toll on your health. “Several studies have found a direct link between excess sugar consumption and obesity and cardiovascular problems worldwide,” Bremer says.

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# Sweet Stuff

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Because of these harmful effects, many health organizations recommend that Americans cut back on added sugars. But added sugars can be hard to identify. On a list of ingredients, they may be listed as sucrose (table sugar), corn sweetener, high-fructose corn syrup, fruit-juice concentrates, nectars, raw sugar, malt syrup, maple syrup, fructose sweeteners, liquid fructose, honey, molasses, anhydrous dextrose, or other words ending in “-ose,” the chemical suffix for sugars. If any of these words are among the first few ingredients on a food label, the food is likely high in sugar. The total amount of sugar in a food is listed under “Total Carbohydrate” on the Nutrition Facts label.

Many people try cutting back on calories by switching from sugar-sweetened to diet foods and drinks that contain low- or no-calorie sweeteners. These artificial sweeteners—also known as sugar substitutes—are many times sweeter than table sugar, so smaller amounts are needed to create the same level of sweetness.

People have debated the safety of artificial sweeteners for decades. To date, researchers have found no clear evidence that any artificial sweeteners approved for use in the U.S. cause cancer or other serious health problems in humans.

But can they help with weight loss? Scientific evidence is mixed. Some studies suggest that diet drinks can help you drop pounds in the short term, but weight tends to creep back up over time. Rother and other NIH-funded researchers are now working to better understand the complex effects that artificial sweeteners can have on the human body.

Studies of rodents and small numbers of people suggest that artificial sweeteners can affect the healthful gut microbes that help us digest food. This in turn can alter the body’s ability to use glucose, which might then lead to weight gain. But until larger studies are done in people, the long-term impact of these sweeteners on gut microbes and weight remains uncertain.

“There’s much controversy about the health effects of artificial sweeteners and the differences between sugars and sweeteners,” says Dr. Ivan de Araujo of Yale University. “Some animal studies indicate that sweeteners can produce physiological effects. But depending on what kind of measurement is taken, including in humans, the outcomes may be conflicting.”

De Araujo and others have been studying the effects that sugars and low-calorie sweeteners might have on the brain. His animal



studies found that sugar and sweeteners tap differently into the brain’s reward circuitry, with sugars having a more powerful and pleasurable effect.

“The part of the brain that mediates the ‘I can’t stop’ kinds of behaviors seems to be especially sensitive to sugars and largely insensitive to artificial sweeteners,” de Araujo says. “Our long-term goal is really to understand if sugars or caloric sweeteners drive persistent intake of food. If exposed to too much sugar, does the brain eventually change in ways that lead to excess consumption? That’s what we’d like to know.”

“In the long run, if you want to lose weight, you need to establish a healthy lifestyle that contains unprocessed foods, moderate calories, and more exercise,” Rother says.

When kids grow up eating a lot of sweet foods, they tend to develop a preference for sweets. But if you give them a variety of healthy foods like fruits and vegetables early in life, they’ll develop a liking for them too.

“It’s important for parents to expose children to a variety of tastes early on, but realize that it often takes several attempts to get a child to eat such foods,” says Bremer. “Don’t give up too soon.”

The key to good health is eating a well-balanced diet with a variety of foods and getting plenty of physical activity. Focus on nutrition-rich whole foods without added sugars. Get tips on healthy eating and weight control at <http://win.niddk.nih.gov>.

*This article was written by the National Institutes of Health, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information, go to <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov>.*

## Cut Added Sugars

- Choose water, fat-free milk, or unsweetened tea or coffee instead of sodas, sports drinks, energy drinks, and fruit drinks.
- Reduce sugar in recipes. If a recipe says 1 cup, use 2/3 cup.
- Eat fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits without added sugar. Choose fruits canned in their own juice rather than syrup.
- Use fruits to top foods like cereal and pancakes rather than sugars, syrups, or other sweet toppings.
- Read the ingredients list to pick food with little or no added sugar.
- Use the Nutrition Facts label to choose packaged foods with less total sugar.

## Keep your desk—and your career—organized for success

A messy desk doesn't just slow down your ability to find things—it can impede your career development.



A survey of HR executives by OfficeTeam found that more than eight in 10 said an untidy workspace influences their view of that employee's professionalism.

Peter Walsh, of Peter Walsh Design in Sherman Oaks, Calif., says that almost 49 percent of your co-workers wonder about your abilities if you're not capable of keeping your desk clean.

With that in mind, try these tips for keeping your working area neat and efficient:

- Create “zones.” Don't just toss documents, books, supplies, etc., across your desk. Designate specific areas for particular items: progress reports in one corner, mail in another, staplers and paperclips in your top drawer, and so forth. This will make finding things quicker and easier.
- Clean up regularly. Before lunch, and right before you go home, spend a few minutes sorting your desk. File what you need, discard what you don't, and straighten everything up so it's waiting in the right location when you return.
- Respond promptly. Resist the urge to set stuff aside for an indeterminate “later.” Make a point of filing, discarding, or acting on items right away so they don't pile up and become overwhelming to contemplate.

## Assess your career health in these key areas

Are you moving forward in your career, or just running in place? In the middle of everything that's going on, figuring out where you stand can be tricky.

From time to time, audit your progress with this self-assessment:

- **Impact.** Try to measure the effect of your work on your organization. Can you point to revenues, measurable progress, specific improvement, or some other concrete metric that support your organization's objectives? Important: Has your impact grown over time? Be sure you can point to concrete evidence of the value you provide.
- **Leadership.** Even if you don't have “manager” in your job title, try to be the kind of employee others look to for advice, assistance, and support. Do people throughout your organization know your name? Do people ask for (and listen to) your opinions? Is your attendance required at important meetings?
- **Industry.** Take a good look at your organization and its place in whatever business you're in. If the industry is thriving, you're probably well positioned for advancement and career success. But if it's shrinking, you might want to start looking for some way to use your skills in a capacity that supports a growing field.
- **Development.** Have you learned anything new recently? Are opportunities for coaching, mentoring, and further development plentiful? Make a solid effort to stay on top of trends and technology so you don't get left behind.
- **Mondays.** If you look forward to returning to work, you're in a good place. Spend a few minutes examining why you like your job and how you could enjoy it even more. On the other hand, if you dread the thought of going into the office, your career probably isn't going anywhere soon, whatever your job is. Look for some way to make changes that will reinvigorate your enthusiasm for your career.



## Take this quiz before starting to exercise

Ready to start an exercise program? Good for you! But before you begin, answer these questions to ensure that your workout routine is healthy and safe for you:

1. Has your physician ever told you that you have a heart condition, or recommended that you should avoid physical exercise without a consultation first?
2. Do you experience chest pain when you perform physical activity?
3. In the past 30 days, have you experienced any chest pain when you were NOT doing physical activity?
4. Do you tend to grow dizzy and lose your balance (or consciousness)?
5. Do you have any bone or joint problems that physical activity might make worse?
6. Are you currently taking any prescribed medication for your blood pressure or heart?

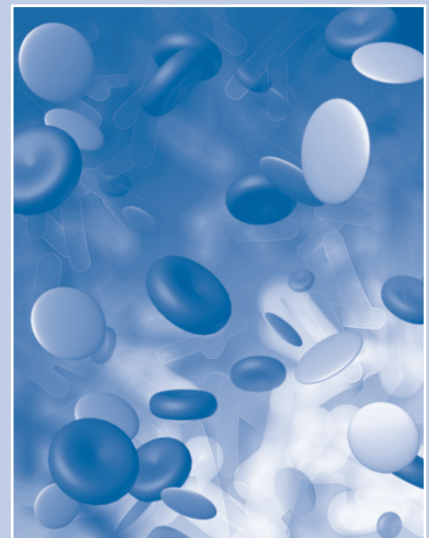
If you answer any of these questions “yes,” check with your doctor before heading to the gym.

## Blood is life: Here’s what you’ll be asked to donate

Blood, like air, is one of those things you probably don’t think about much until you really need it. It’s vital to life—so important that we’re regularly asked to donate it for others to use.

You might be afraid of needles, or nervous around the sight of blood (especially your own), but learning about the process can calm your nerves and maybe prompt you to volunteer to visit your local blood bank soon. To get ready, you should understand the different options for donating you’re likely to be asked about:

- **Whole blood.** This is the most common form of blood donation. A pint of blood is drawn from the volunteer, then usually separated out into distinct components (red cells, plasma, platelets, or others) for future transfusions. The donation process typically takes about an hour, although the actual blood draw usually lasts only 8-10 minutes or so. Whole blood can be stored for about 42 days.
- **Platelets.** Platelets are blood cell fragments that stop bleeding. Platelet donation involves apheresis, a procedure that collects only specific components of blood. A special machine draws and screens out what’s needed, and then returns the blood to the volunteer. The apheresis process for platelets may take an hour and a half or longer.
- **Plasma.** Plasma is the liquid portion of blood that supplies water and nutrients to the body’s tissues. Blood type is important: People with type AB blood are universal donors for plasma (although they can only donate red blood cells to other AB patients). It’s a process that usually takes about one hour and 15 minutes.
- **Double red cells.** Red blood cells are the most commonly transfused type of blood. Two pints of cells are collected (as opposed to one pint of whole blood) using apheresis, and the process takes about 30 minutes longer than the standard whole blood donation. Donors are required to meet somewhat higher levels of hemoglobin and body/weight measurements.



# SAFETY

## Stay safe at work by reducing stress

Excessive stress can interfere with your ability to concentrate on working safely and taking care of your overall health.

When the pressure starts getting to you, take a few minutes to center yourself with these tips:

### **Take a deep breath.**

Shallow breathing can contribute to stressful feelings.

Try this easy exercise: Close off your right nostril and inhale slowly through the left. Hold that breath for a count of five. Then close off your left nostril and exhale out of your right nostril. Do this for about five minutes. Breathing slowly and deeply helps prevent stress from overwhelming you.

### **Reach for protein.**

When work gets in the way of eating, we tend to reach for quick-fix snacks that are high in caffeine and sugar.

Instead, try snacking on foods that are richer in energyboosting proteins and minerals like potassium, which gets depleted when we're stressed. Better alternatives: peanut butter on a banana or whole-wheat crackers.

### **Take a walk.**

Walking just five minutes with your mind focused on your stride and your breathing does wonders to clear your head. If you can't take a long walk (or don't want to), simply step outside for a few minutes, swing your arms back and forth, and breathe deeply for an energy boost.

Even better, take time before or after work to get a workout at your local gym. Take a class in zumba, yoga or Pilates. Exercise helps your body and your mind, and helps prepare you for the work ahead.



## On the road? Your employer won't always protect you

If you travel for work, your employer may be liable for accidents or injuries that you suffer off-site—but not in every case.

Be careful to avoid these mistakes that could leave you exposed:

### **Your injury is the result of your own misconduct**

You can't drive a car while intoxicated, or take unreasonable chances with your personal safety, and expect your employer to take responsibility. Behave professionally at all times when traveling on business.



### **You refuse medical treatment**

You may think you're not seriously injured, but take the time to visit a doctor or emergency room after any accident. Waiting too long may aggravate the injury, and reduce your employer's responsibility for treatment.

### **You make a claim 12 months or more after an incident**

Don't delay when you're injured. Inform your employer promptly so the organization can investigate and confirm the details of your situation.

## Keep the spark alive in your key relationships

Your most important relationships—with your spouse, your friends, and your children—could probably use an infusion of fun from time to time. Fortunately, you don't have to go to elaborate lengths to avoid falling into a rut. Here are some small steps you can take to keep those relationships fresh:

### With your spouse or partner:

- Plan a date night. No kids.
- Hide some inexpensive gifts around the house.
- Call, text, or email in the middle of the day for no reason.

### With friends:

- Send a fun, funny card.
- Get together for no reason.
- Call just to chat from time to time.

### With children:

- Have fun with the shaving cream during bath time.
- Have a race with the kids to see who sets the table first.
- Dance and sing.

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## The American Business Association

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