



International Sugar Organization

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"The Sweetest Sin? The Debate"

Dear Colleagues and Friends


The Executive Director of the International Sugar Organization, in an effort to disseminate positive information regarding sugar and health, has the pleasure to enclose a recent article published in the Canary Wharf Magazine (February 2016 issue) entitled "The Sweetest Sin? The Debate".

The sweetest sin? THE DEBATE

From a 4pm chocolate pick-me-up to a sweet cup of tea, everyone has their sugary pleasure. Less tempting is the side of guilt, as we're told how detrimental to health and well-being sugar is. But, where has the notion come from, and is it really the case?

WORDS: CHARLOTTE PHILLIPS





On some level, sugar makes us happy. Whether because it increases serotonin levels, which acts as an anti-depressant, and dopamine levels, which triggers our experience of reward and pleasure, or simply because we know it's indulgent and it tastes good, there's no denying that it quite literally makes life sweeter.

But sugar has received a bad reputation of late. What with it being deemed as 'addictive as cocaine' in countless articles that claim its consumption is responsible for diabetes, obesity and depression, it would seem as though the white stuff is slowly but surely killing us all.

This virulent anti-sugar campaign has come at a time of extreme health awareness around food. Indeed, orthorexia nervosa is increasingly coming to the forefront of medical recognition: it is an excessive focus on eating only healthy, highly restricted foods, and an all-consuming preoccupation with staying away from toxicity.

“The biggest problem contributing to obesity is lack of physical exercise”

However, it mustn't be forgotten that our ancestors have been eating sugar for generations. Home-made treats used a small number of simple ingredients including sugar; whereas today, we cook less, buy more, and ingredient lists include more chemicals and preservatives. Ironically, as the diet market has expanded, so have our waistlines. But why is sugar the specific enemy?

Media reports can be confusing, but on hand to disseminate fact from fiction is José Orive, executive director at the International Sugar Organization (ISO), who is based in One Canada Square, Canary Wharf.

The ISO is a UN body that conducts a variety of sugar-related tasks, from dealing with traders and growers to overseeing research and organising conferences. Orive believes that consumers lack factual information around sugar.

“Sugar has been demonised by people who have something to gain from doing so,” he says, namely, “so-called experts and those in the alternative sweetener industry.” ▶

► Orive suggests the biggest culprit contributing to obesity is lack of physical exercise. “Sugar is just the latest food item to be used as a ‘whipping voice’. Salt and red meat have also come under fire at various points.”

So has fat, says Professor David Benton, Professor of Psychology at Swansea University. “We have been down this road before. The case for fat being the basis of obesity led to supermarkets being filled with the low-fat or ‘lite’ options, and these novel food items did not reverse the incidence of obesity.” He continues, “Why, if reducing fat did not work, would it then be expected that reducing the amount of sugar in our diets will be more successful?”

Indeed, author of *The Sugar Casino*, Jonathan Kingsman writes, “we are consuming less sugar per person than our parents did, but obesity rates for adults and children have increased horrifically during the past 40 years.”

Kingsman’s November 2015 article *Sugar and Health: Letting the Facts Spoil a Good Story* explains why: we’re eating 450 calories per day more than they did, often due to fatty and fast food. Kingsman writes, “Sugar isn’t responsible for the obesity epidemic and cutting it out won’t solve the problem. Reducing portion sizes and taking the stairs will.”

Likewise, while Type 2 diabetes is often heralded as the result of too much sugar, Orive says it’s caused by being overweight due to higher caloric intake than expenditure, “no matter where the calories come from.” Indeed, research from the charity Diabetes UK states, “While reducing the amount of sugar in our diets can be important, people should do this because sugar contains lots of calories, rather than because of any direct effect it may or may not have on risk of Type 2 diabetes.”

And furthermore, if an individual chooses to avoid sugar, they’ll likely swap it for fat, says Professor Benton. “The risk is that removing sugar will lead to the choice of food higher in fat, to ensure that palatability is maintained. Dietary surveys have reported the so-called sugar-fat seesaw. Per gram, fat has more than twice the calories as sugar.” This could arguably lead to even more weight gain and related illness.

However, to ignore the dangers of sugar entirely would be foolish. Certainly, gram for gram, sugar is higher in calories than many foods, offers little nutritional benefit, and has been linked to insulin resistance and tooth decay.

Francesca Liparoti is a nutritional therapist who



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works with the Wellness Centre at Reebok Sports Club in Canary Wharf. “The sugar we have today is of a worse quality than our ancestors were exposed to,” she says. “Their sugar came from scavenging for fruits, a labour-intensive process resulting in a small amount of natural sugar to satiate a sweet tooth, with the natural vitamins and minerals present still intact. Today, it’s been processed to the extent that there is no goodness left in sugar at all.”

As well as quality, Liparoti has a problem with unreported sugar quantity. “It’s everywhere you turn, and we’re all eating more than we think.”

Thirty grams (7 teaspoons) is the most added sugar an adult should be consuming daily, say nutrition experts, yet a single 330ml can of coke contains 35g, and it’s added to innocent-looking foods like salad dressing and cereal.

Unquestionably, sugar should form part of a balanced diet, not the basis of it.

However, the future of the sugar industry need not be bleak. There are increasingly innovative and beneficial combinations of the sweet stuff emerging, explains Orive. “In Guatemala and other developing countries, sugar is fortified with vitamin A, which children are often deficient in. In 17 years, they’ve eliminated child blindness caused through vitamin A deficiency, and next up are trials of sugar fortified with iron.” Why sugar in particular? “Because the overwhelming majority of the population consumes it, especially in remote rural areas, so the ability to reach those that most need vitamin A is enhanced.”

As for today, swearing off sugar would certainly be virtuous, but also, dare I say, a slightly miserable existence, and there’s a risk of entering a deprivation and bingeing cycle.

How should we consume it in the UK? Where you can, make swaps: Liparoti cites switching from Dairy Milk to Green & Black’s chocolate with a high cocoa percentage and less added sugar. She also recommends that it’s worth checking how many grams of sugar are in items like pasta sauce and soups, before you buy.

As with most things, sugar should be enjoyed in moderation, and, of course, in conjunction with a balanced lifestyle including physical exercise.

Eat the brownie. Just, not all of it, not every day, and don’t wash it down with a Coke. ^{cw}

*Wellness Club at Reebok Sports Centre,
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