LIFE IS SWEET

Chocolate, cookies, ice cream, candy, soda - who doesn't love these things? Your bathroom scale probably doesn't. Research has shown that sugar contributes to obesity and diabetes. Plus, a new study links *reduced consumption* of sugar-sweetened drinks such as soda, fruit drinks, and lemonade with improved blood pressure.

The American Heart Association recommends limiting your sugar intake to an average of 100 calories per day for most women and 150 per day for men. Why is this so hard? *Sugar is addictive*. The more you eat it, the more you crave it.

More bad news: once your body uses the energy it needs from the sugar you eat, it converts the remaining into fat to store for later use. But there are options...Read more.

Following, are some interesting facts about sugar:

- ✓ ***Consumption.*** Today, an average American consumes 2-3 pounds of sugar *each week*. While at the end of the 19th century (1887-1890), the average American consumed only 5 lbs. *per year*.

- ✓ ***A Continual Rise.*** Over the last 20 years, sugar consumption in the U.S. has increased from 26 pounds to 135 lbs. per person per year.

- ✓ ***Hidden Culprits.*** Sugar consumption includes highly refined sugars that are incorporated into many of the foods we eat (but might not expect to find sugar) such as bread, peanut butter, condiments and sauces. Some of these are listed in the ingredients as sucrose (table sugar), dextrose (corn sugar), and high-fructose corn syrup.

- ✓ ***Health Issues*****.** Simple sugars have been documented to contribute to and/or aggravate health problems, including: asthma, mood disorders, mental illness, nervous disorders, diabetes, heart disease, gallstones, hypertension, and arthritis.

- ✓ ***Insulin Impacts.*** Sugar raises insulin levels, inhibiting the release of growth hormones, which depresses the immune system. Further, too much insulin promotes the storage of fat, so that when you eat foods that are high in sugar, you're enabling rapid weight gain and elevated triglyceride levels, both of which have been linked to cardiovascular disease.

- ✓ ***Degenerative Disease.*** Sugar has no real nutritional value (as do minerals, vitamins and fiber) and as a result, has a deteriorating effect on the endocrine system, causing sugar consumption to be one of the 3 major causes of degenerative disease.

- ✓ ***Cancer Perpetrator.*** Turns out that cancer's preferred fuel is none other than glucose. Controlling one's blood-glucose levels through diet, exercise, supplements, meditation and prescription drugs (when necessary) can be extremely important to a cancer treatment program.

Here are the pros and cons of some common sweeteners:

SUGAR

Pros

White sugar is derived form sugar cane and the sugar beet, while brown is white sugar with molasses. Brown sugar has a higher water content, and thus slightly fewer calories. Sugar tastes good, bakes well and converts to energy quickly.

Cons

With 60 calories per tablespoon, sugar is calorie-dense and lacks nutrients. And that sugar high you get will be quickly followed by a crash. Also, too much sugar leads to bacteria formation and cavities.

HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP

Pros

High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) extends the shelf life of foods. It is also cheaper that sugar which is why natural or organic sodas will cost more than Coca-Cola, which used HFCS.

Cons

Excess sugar consumption is linked to various health concerns, and HFCS is quickly becoming the most common sweetener in out food supply. A recent study out of Britain suggests that it may even cause fat cells in children to multiply.

HONEY

Pros

Honey is sweeter than sugar, so less is more. It also has throat-soothing properties, minor antioxidant and digestive benefits, and has been found to keep levels of blood sugar fairly constant compared with other types of sweeteners.

Cons

At 64 calories per tablespoon, honey is slightly more calorie-dense than sugar.

SUCRALOSE (Splenda)

Pros

Sucralose is considered the safest artificial sweetener on the market, after numerous studies it has been shown to have no side effects. Splenda is 600 times sweeter than sugar yet noncaloric and works well with cooking and baking.

Cons

Splenda has a slight chemical taste, which is true of all artificial sweeteners. Splenda contains bulking agents dextrose and maltodextrin, which are derived from starches such as corn or wheat.

ASPARTAME (NutraSweet, Equal)

Pros

Aspartame is only needed in very small amounts. It has 200 times the sweetness of sugar. It is considered safe by the FDA, except for people with phenylketonuria, or PKU.

Cons

It doesn't break down well in the cooking or baking process, so it is mainly useful for sweetening drinks and sprinkling on cereal or berries.

SACCHARIN (Sweet 'N Low, Sugar Twin)

Pros

Saccharin contains no calories and does not raise blood sugar levels.

Cons

Research studies during the early 1970s linked saccharin with the development of bladder cancer.

STEVIA

Pros

Stevia is a sweet herb, not an artificial sweetener. Stevia based sweeteners such as PureVia and Truvia hold a GRAS or "Generally Recognized as Safe" rating from the FDA.

Cons

Women who are pregnant or breast feeding and young children should avoid stevia. Research studies on stevia are very minimal and its safety has not been established

To sum up...

So next time you want to indulge in the over-sized slice of chocolate cake or the pint of your favorite ice cream, just remind yourself of the effects of such a large amount of sugar on your body.

But if you *have to have* a sweet treat, think about these instead: chocolate mousse, sorbet, or angel food cake with mixed berries.