

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT Sugar and Your Immune System

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You probably know that there are many important reasons to cut down on sugar. That includes losing weight and preventing cavities. If you need more motivation, you can think about your immune system too.

A growing body of research has found that the sweet stuff can undermine immune functioning. **Sugar plays a major role in diabetes and a wide variety of other metabolic disorders.**

High blood sugar has also been associated with imbalances in gut bacteria, higher levels of inflammatory proteins, and increased rates of certain autoimmune diseases.

It's a widespread issue because most adults eat way too much sugar. The recommended daily guidelines are 36 grams for men, and 25 for women. To put that in perspective, a can of soda contains about 32 grams.

Meanwhile, most of us eat about 77 grams, which is 3 times over the guidelines.

**Satisfy your sweet tooth without putting yourself at higher risk for serious medical conditions.** Try these suggestions for eating less sugar and boosting your immunity.

### Cutting Back on Sugar:

1. **Taper down.** You'll miss sugar less if you make gradual changes. For example, add half as much to your coffee each day.
2. **Read labels.** You might be surprised by the hidden sugar in many processed foods, such as sauces and soups. Check the ingredients, where it might be called

many different names including dextrose and syrup.

3. **Eat fruit.** For healthier treats, snack on plain fruit. Keep a bowl of apples and oranges in sight on your kitchen counter.
4. **Enjoy dark chocolate.** It's the smart choice for chocolate lovers because it has less sugar and many health benefits. Make a dip for fruit or add dark cocoa powder to hummus.
5. **Shrink portion sizes. You can eat just about anything if you practice moderation.** Prepare a small bowl of chips or ice cream instead of eating out of the container.
6. **Use natural sweeteners.** Sugar substitutes can still contribute to weight gain and cravings for sweets. Use them sparingly and opt for natural products like stevia.
7. **Drink water.** Soda, juice, cocktails, and other sweetened beverages are a major source of added sugar. Quench your thirst with plain water or tea.
8. **Be patient. Your taste buds will adapt to a low sugar diet over time.** In a few weeks, you'll probably prefer healthier foods.

### **Boosting Your Immune System:**

1. **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity increases circulation and causes positive changes in antibodies and white blood cells that fight infection. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity each week.

2. **Sleep well.** You're more prone to illness when you're deprived of sleep. Go to bed and wake up on a consistent schedule that gives you 7 to 8 hours of rest.
  
3. **Manage stress. Chronic tension results in inflammation and fewer immune cells.** Find relaxation methods that work for you, like listening to music. Talk about your feelings with a friend or a professional therapist.
  
4. **Wash your hands.** According to Northwestern Medicine, clean hands can prevent one in three diarrhea-related illnesses, and one in five respiratory infections. Wash them 6 to 10 times a day, especially before you handle food and after you use the bathroom.
  
5. **Quit smoking.** The tar and nicotine in tobacco interfere with immune functioning, which increases the risk of cancer and other serious conditions. Pick a date to quit. Social support and nicotine replacement devices may help.

**Managing your sugar intake may be easier than you think.** You can eat delicious whole foods while avoiding empty calories and enhancing your overall health and wellbeing.