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Glamour Health

"How many boxes of Girl Scout Samoa cookies is considered a serving size?"
—Michael Ian Black



If cotton is a plant, then cotton candy is a veggie, right?

What Sugar Really Does to Your Body

There's bad news, and there's good news. Here's how you can stay healthy.

by Jessica Girdwain

Another day, another headline about all the dangers sugar poses to your health. But here's something you may not have read: Consumption of added sugars (the sweeteners food companies frequently put in their products) actually decreased 23 percent between 1999 and 2008. That's a huge improvement, but some experts wish we'd get the number even lower, given the hazards scientists are uncovering about these additives. "Sugar is not a toxin in the sense you should never eat it," says Richard J. Johnson, M.D., a professor at the University of Colorado Medical Center in Denver and author of *The Fat Switch*. "We're just eating too much." If you think you've been overindulging, turn the page for four new reasons to cut back—and a simple plan to help you do just that.

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It dumbs you down. Diets high in sugar basically put your brain in a food coma: Cells are sapped of the energy they need to communicate efficiently, making it harder for you to learn and remember information, says Fernando Gómez-Pinilla, Ph.D., a neuroscientist at the University of California, Los Angeles.

It dampens mood. You've heard of probiotics—healthy bacteria in the gut. Well, refined sugars breed the opposite, says psychologist Stephen Ilardi, Ph.D., author of *The Depression Cure*. And these unhealthy bacteria cause the release of inflammatory hormones, which can put your body in a state of stress that, over time, may increase your risk of depression, he says.

It wrinkles skin. When too much sugar circulates in the blood, it starts attaching itself to collagen and elastin—two substances that ordinarily keep skin looking young, says dermatologist Zoe Draelos, M.D., who practices in High Point, North Carolina. The result: Your skin becomes stiffer and more prone to wrinkles.

It weakens eyesight. Proteins in your retinas keep vision sharp. But when the body breaks down simple sugars, by-products latch onto these proteins, accelerating aging—and words may begin looking blurry or distorted, especially in low light.

But wait! There's good news.

You don't have to swear off sweets altogether. To slash your sugar intake relatively painlessly:

Switch to diet soda. Regular soda is the leading food source of added sugars. Swapping one 12-ounce bottle for diet soda or (better!) water saves you about 39 grams of sugar and 140 calories.

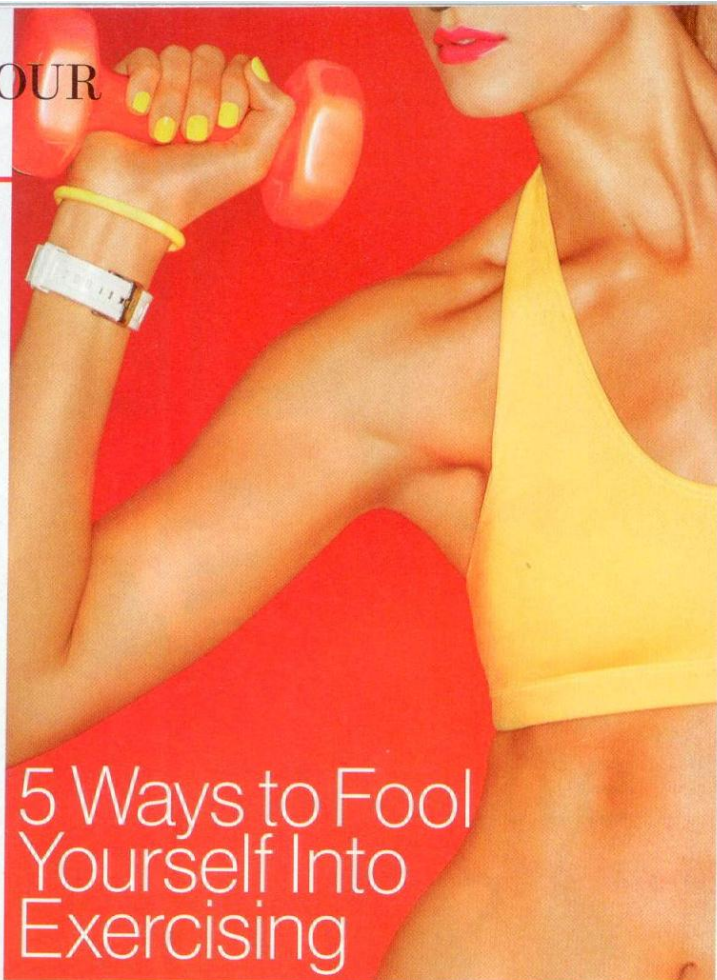
Bake at home. Packaged foods generally have more sugar than anything you'd cook, says dietitian Rachel Beller, R.D., author of *Eat to Lose, Eat to Win*.

Eat slowly. Really. "The more sugar that hits the liver all at once, the worse the damage," says Dr. Johnson.

Fit in fiber-rich foods. "They slow digestion and help level blood sugar," says Beller.

Check labels on low-fat items. Food manufacturers often add copious amounts of sugar to make up for lost flavor.

Incorporate more omega-3s. These fatty acids found in oily fish, flaxseeds, and walnuts can offset sugar's harmful effects on the brain, says Gómez-Pinilla. ■



5 Ways to Fool Yourself Into Exercising

We know: It's hard to pry your body out from under the covers this time of year. These little tricks do it.

Tell yourself, "I only have to work out for 7 minutes."

And if you want to stop after that, give yourself permission. You probably won't: It takes only about six minutes for the feel-good hormones of exercise to kick in, says Wayne Westcott, a fitness researcher and instructor of exercise science at Quincy College in Massachusetts. And if you *do* throw in the towel? Seven minutes is better than nothing.

Listen to your exercise playlist before exercising.

Cranking the tunes you work out to *preworkout* will get you into the right headspace, says Kristin McGee, a trainer in New York City. "They

create an almost Pavlovian response," says McGee. "You hear them and you know it's time to sweat."

Work out with someone who is 40 percent more fit than you are.

Women in a Kansas State University study who did this exercised harder and longer than they otherwise would have—and didn't feel more tired. The researchers say 40 percent is the "sweet spot" at which your workout partner is good enough to inspire you but not so fit that you can't keep up.

Schedule it into your calendar.

Then "invite" someone to the event. The per-

son doesn't have to do the workout with you—the point is that your friend/sister/cubemate knows your agenda and can make sure you're sticking to it, says McGee. Remember to return the favor for her.

Stop debating the damn workout and just go.

"You might not want to exercise, and you know what? That's OK," says Beverly Hills-based trainer Gunnar Peterson, who works with Sofia Vergara, Khloé Kardashian, and Minka Kelly. "But it doesn't mean you don't do it. I see people hem and haw over 'Should I work out?' And it's like, Shut up! You could be done already."

—Shaun Dreisbach