Is There a Connection Between ADHD and Sugar?

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ADHD and Sugar

When you need to recharge after a long afternoon in the office, do you reach for a can of soda pop or perhaps the energy rush from a sugary snack?

The average adult eats 24 teaspoons of added sugar every single day, an excessive amount that has been linked to an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, liver problems, obesity, and more.

And this extreme amount of dietary sugar may be one of the factors behind the rise of ADHD, exposing the bitter side effects of our country's sweet addiction.

The Murky Scientific Breakdown

According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, sweeteners — sugar, as well as sugar substitutes like aspartame — may increase hyperactivity and reduce attention spans.

While some studies back this claim, other studies suggest sugar has little to no effect on ADHD. More research needs to be done on the ADHD and sugar connection, but what is definitely for certain are five simple facts that will make you question your sugar habits.

1. Americans as a whole are eating far too much sugar on a daily basis, and the amount of sugar we're eating has gone up by 30 percent in the past few years.

2. Every time you eat refined sugar, your blood sugar levels spike and this alone can cause hyperactivity.

3. Eating sugar causes your pancreas to produce more insulin, which in turn spikes your levels of the hormone adrenaline. This release of adrenaline has been shown to trigger ADHD.

4. Sugar affects the levels of dopamine in your brain, and these fluctuating hormone levels may increase your ADHD symptoms.

5. Consuming sugar has been linked to attention deficiency and hyperactivity that's similar to ADHD. While these studies haven't linked sugar specifically to diagnosed ADHD itself, the link to lookalike symptoms will make you raise an eyebrow!

You'll notice a common thread in this research. In all of them, there's a strong connection between sugar and the hormones that may trigger ADHD.

There's also an undisputed link between sugar and ADHD symptoms.

What hasn’t can contribute to boosting is a link between sugar and an actual clinical diagnosis of ADHD, but it’s clear that our ever-increasing use of sweeteners is playing a role in our brain health.

5 Ways to Remove Sugar From Your Diet

Take back your health and defeat your sugar addiction. This just might be the secret solution you’ve been looking for to manage your ADHD naturally.

1. Check the Ingredients Label

This might seem like an obvious step, but what’s not so obvious is how sugar hides in foods that aren’t even dessert.

For example, you’ll find sugar added to everything from whole-wheat bread to that jar of pasta sauce in your pantry. Scan the ingredients label on all the food that you buy, and you might be shocked by how often you find this dangerous additive lurking in your shopping cart.

2. Avoid “Undercover” Sugar

Sugar isn’t always listed just as sugar, but the effects on your hyperactivity are the same. Here are some of the most common alternative names that manufacturers use to hide sugar in your food:

- Dextrose
- Fructose
- Corn sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Evaporated corn juice or fruit juice concentrate
- High-fructose corn syrup,
- Crystalline fructose
- Corn syrup solids
- Malt syrup

3. Pair Sugar with Fiber

You should be eating 35 grams of fiber every day, but most Americans don’t even eat half of this recommended amount. Increase your fiber intake, and always pair a sweet food with a high-fiber food. You may even want to invest in a fiber supplement, such as psyllium husks.

Studies have shown that eating more fiber can help control your blood sugar levels and prevent the spike in blood sugar when you eat a sweet snack.

Plus, the fiber may contribute to boosting your gut health and maintain healthy amounts of beneficial gut bacteria. Healthy, happy gut bacteria may be linked to reduced risk of ADHD and ADHD symptoms.

4. Know your Craving Triggers

Many of us unconsciously turn to sugar to help us cope with our emotions, like stress or frustration or even boredom. Know what triggers you to reach for a sweet drink or a sugary snack.

Keep a journal at home or on your office desk, and as you feel temptation creep in, jot down the situation or what you’re feeling. You’ll soon notice a pattern.

Once you recognize it, you can start to incorporate healthier alternatives, such as going for a walk or doing a quick 5-minute meditation to soothe stress.

5. Add Spices, Not Sweeteners

Many of us love a little extra sugar because it enhances the flavor of our food and drinks. Get a similar taste bud-tantalizing effect by turning to healthy spices and herbs. Think a squeeze of lemon juice in your tea instead of sweet tea. Or a dab of vanilla extract in your coffee instead of cream and sugar.

Not only does this help you to dramatically slash your sugar intake while not feeling like you're stuck on a restrictive diet, but it can also bring some side health perks. For example, cinnamon can reduce your blood sugar levels by 24 percent!

While sugar can be found in many of our foods, and it can be hard to kick a habit that's so pervasive in our culture, incorporating these five strategies can help liberate you from confusing vast amounts of sugar.

You'll feel more energized, minimize your risks of chronic diseases like heart disease, and find relief from many of the symptoms related to ADHD.

Resources

Harvard Health Publications (The Sweet Danger of Sugar)

Medline Plus (Hyperactivity and Sugar)

NCBI (Correlation Between Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Sugar Consumption, Quality of Diet, and Dietary Behavior in School Children)

Obesity Society (U.S. Adult Consumption of Added Sugars Increased by More Than 30% Over Three Decades)

NCBI (Effect of Nutritional Supplements on Attentional-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

Joslin Diabetes Center (How Does Fiber Affect Blood Glucose Levels?)

NCBI (Nutrition in the Treatment of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Neglected but Important Aspect)

Psychology Today (Gut, Autism, and ADHD)

NCBI (Hyperactivity and Diet Treatment: A Meta-Analysis of the Feingold Hypothesis)

WebMD (Does Cinnamon Help Diabetes?)

NCBI (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Is It Time to Reappraise the Role of Sugar Consumption?)