

Sugar addiction and fatty liver

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The word addiction to human mind is mostly related to alcohol, tobacco and psychotropic drugs. But sugar now is emerging as a new addiction that we might be ignoring, and passing off as just an innocuous fancy.



Many of us describe ourselves as having a sweet tooth, and indulge our taste buds and liver with excess of sugar.

In a recently concluded

National Conclave on Fatty Liver Disease, doctors described how true addiction to sugar and sugary drinks is emerging as a major cause for concern.

Statistics are worrying. Several Indian hepatologists reported excess fat in the liver of up to 50% of Indians, especially those living in cities. The Body mass Index (BMI) of urban school children have been rising with over 30% being overweight. And what seems to be the common denominator is excess consumption of sugars, sweets and fruit juices. Addiction to sugar is now established. Those suffering from it show all the typical symptoms from regular wants, to increasing demands, to craving. And if one is to go without sweets for a day or two, show anger and irritability (withdrawal) as well.

A special subset of sugar addiction is Fructo-Holism, fructose being the predominant sugar in fruits and juices. Scientists have noticed that fructose sugar causes more accumulation of fat in the liver compared with the regular sucrose.

In a chilling account of what we have always considered innocuous, and perhaps even healthy, excess fructose have been shown to get converted to fat and deposited in the liver, causing fatty liver.

But why should that worry us? It is now clear that those who have extra fat in the liver are at increased risk of developing the Metabolic Syndrome: a conglomeration of excess body weight, diabetes, hypertension, high blood lipids and translating into increased risk of cardio-vascular disease.

Cardiovascular (heart attacks) and metabolic diseases (diabetes) have emerged as the commonest cause (60%) of death and ill health in India. And what might be fuelling them could be our social practice and indulgence in sweets and fruit juices. It's time we took note and changed our practices and preferences.