

# IS SUGAR ADDICTIVE?

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Addiction is a very strong word. It is used to describe a neuropsychological disorder in which there is an intense urge or need for a certain object or behaviour even if one knows it can cause harm. Sugar on the other hand is described as the 'sweetest seductress' among all the foods. Hence, it makes one wonder, can such a strong word like addiction be associated with sugar.



There are people who crave sugar after every meal, there are others who feel that going without sugar affects their mood and behaviour, while some believe kids get hyper after eating excess sugar.

We naturally like the taste of sweet foods, and therefore, when it's time for celebration, gifting, or rewarding, or even to come out of sad moments, sugar is the sweetest contributor. Many of us can't go without sugar in our morning cup of tea or coffee. Is this some sort of reliance on sugary foods or is it addiction?

**Science behind sugar craving** Scientists believe that addiction is a phenomenon that alters the brain chemistry. Intake of excess sugar gradually starts showing signs of serious craving. When excess sugar is taken, the pleasure centres in the brain get activated. This results in the release of feel-good chemicals like dopamine, which then further activates the 'reward circuit' in the brain. In simple words, excess intake of sugar gives a sense of pleasure and motivation to do something when you are happy.

Hence, every time we take excess sugar, we activate these pathways in the brain, and this triggers dopamine, making us crave more. However, there are some researchers, who believe that such activity is seen in rodents and not in humans.

Whatever the case may be, the habit of enjoying sugar can become an addiction and we need to look out for the signs.

## Signs of addiction

**Craving for sugar** - When one slice of cake or sweet is not sufficient and you want more. In the supermarket, when you end up buying more and more sugar-rich foods, it's indicative of craving. Fatigue is relieved with sugar. Fatigue or tiredness is usually seen when sugar levels in the body drop. If one is addicted to sugar, the first thought that comes is to take sugar to get relief from the symptoms. **Lying about sugar habits** - This is when one starts lying or hiding one's sugar intake and takes it when one is alone.

Not hungry but still taking sugar – Turning to sugar when one is not hungry is a clear sign of addiction. Behavioural issues, like irritation, and agitation which are seen more when one is craving for sugar are also indicative of addiction.

If one has more than one of the above, then it needs to be controlled as excess sugar is the cause of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

How to curb addiction

Increase your Probiotic intake – Foods like yoghurt, kefir, apple cider vinegar or even probiotic supplements. They help in improving gut health which, in turn, regulates blood sugar levels and reduces appetite. Hence, less craving. Increase your water intake. Go for plain water, infused water, yoghurt, or raw mango drink made without sugar. Sugar craving happens when one is dehydrated. Eat protein-rich foods like eggs, lentils, animal foods, dairy, and nuts. These foods have high satiety, control appetite, and reduce sugar cravings.

Fibre-rich foods like raw veggies, and fruits, whole grains, function in a similar way as proteins in curbing sugar cravings.

To conclude, check out for yourself if you are addicted to sugar or getting into that stage. Going for healthy strategies will not only protect you from getting addicted to sugar but will also promote healthy eating habits.