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Sweet talk

Slash sugary treats for youngsters and reap the benefits in later life.

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KEEPING strict control of sugar intake in early life may have a major impact on reducing the risk of chronic disease later in adulthood.



Researchers from the University of Southern California's Centre for Economic and Social Research found that cutting sugar exposure from conception, up to the child turning two years old, can lessen the chance of them going on to develop high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes.

Published in the journal *Science*, data was analysed from more than 60,000 Brits conceived between 1951 and 1956, and after the sugar rush, when sweets rationing ended in 1953. Those exposed to rationing had a 35% lower risk of type 2 diabetes and a 20% lower risk of high blood pressure than those who hadn't. Sugar restrictions during World War Two are considered on a par with current NHS guidelines, which advise consuming a max of 30g of free sugars a day – around seven sugar cubes.

Your house is likely awash with your child's Halloween haul, and any sweets that didn't get snaffled by trick or treaters. Luckily, it's never too late to make healthier choices. Three experts share their tips for cutting down on the white stuff...

Start their flavour education early

“It’s important to introduce babies to a variety of flavours – not just sweet taste – during weaning, as the more exposure babies have to these less-sweet flavours early on, the more likely they are to accept them later in life,” says Zara Stella, nutritional therapist at Optimal Dental Health.

Experiment with sugar alternatives

“Try adding cinnamon as a healthier alternative to sugar if you have to add something a little sweet,” Dr James Goolnik, dentist at Optimal Dental Health. “Use fruits to sweeten rather than sugar or honey, as fruit has fibre which slows down sugar release so you’re less likely to cause blood sugar spikes.”

Replace packaged snack bars with homemade energy balls

“If you’re after a quick, wholesome snack that is easy to make, energy balls are a fantastic option! Just combine oats, dates and a little cocoa powder in a blender or food processor, then roll the mixture into bite-sized balls,” says superintendent pharmacist Carolina Goncalves at Pharmica. “They’re naturally sweet from the dates and rich in fibre, and the cocoa gives a subtle chocolatey kick.”

Take them on the big shop

“Go shopping with your kids as getting them involved with choosing the weekly shop can make them more excited to try new things. Try [and buy] a different fruit and vegetable each week – again this can help engage them with trying alternative snacks,” says Dr Goolnik.

Avoid treats as rewards for good behaviour

“When rewarding kids, try and not reward with a foodbased item – reward with stickers, stationery, screen time, music etc,” says Dr Goolnik. “Having been a dentist for 30 years, I’ve witnessed first-hand how sugar damages teeth on a daily basis, and we need healthier alternatives to the way society rewards children with sugar, like chocolate and sweets for doing well with homework.”

Know exactly what you’re buying

“Scan items with the Yuka app (it analyses the health impact of foods by scanning the product labels) to better understand what your kids are eating,” says Dr Goolnik.

Gradually introduce healthier swaps

“Don’t do anything too drastic,” says Gabriela Peacock, nutritional therapist. “Just slowly try to replace sugary snacks with healthier alternatives. Offer fruits, yoghurt, or nut butters instead of sweets or sugary cereals – cereal is so bad for you!”

Watch what goes in the cupboard

“Your environment is everything,” says Gabriela. “Stock your cupboards and fridge with healthy options. If you limit the availability of sugary snacks and drinks at home, it really makes it easier for your children to choose healthier alternatives and keep too many sugary foods away.”

Boost their appreciation for vegetables

“The more you eat vegetables, the more you adapt to the taste of them,” says Deborah Grayson, pharmacist and nutritional therapist who runs Digestion with Confidence. “Play

around with different textures of the same food to see which they might learn to like. For example raw carrot, pureed carrot, batons, roasted carrots, the sweetness and texture can vary greatly.”

healthy foods

Find workarounds

“Make your own ice cream from frozen bananas,” says Deborah. “Freeze two inch chunks of banana for a minimum of six hours then blend with milk until the desired consistency is achieved. This can then be flavoured with vanilla or plain cocoa powder according to taste.”

Keep an eye on sugary drinks

“Swap fruit juices for a home-made smoothie with some vegetables blended in or simply give the kids a piece of fruit with a glass of water,” says Zara. “Swap fizzy sugary drinks for sparkling water with fruit slices.”

Focus on finding balance

“We should never stop or limit ourselves from eating pudding with our children or limit sweet treats forever – it’s all about balance,” says Gabriela. “A few treats a week is okay as long as your children are getting enough exercise, sleep and having an overall healthy lifestyle.”