How does sugar affect our heart?

YOUR SWEET TOOTH COULD BE DAMAGING YOUR TICKER, A CARDIOLOGIST TELLS

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NEW research suggests that limiting sugar during pregnancy and the first two years of life can have lasting benefits for our heart health.



The study, published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), looked at 63,433 people from the UK born between October 1951 and March 1956 with no history of heart disease, and from this compared 40,063 people exposed to sugar rationing between 1940 and 1953 with 23,370 people who were not.

They found those who had sugar restricted during the time of pregnancy and in the first two years of life, compared with people never exposed to rationing, had a 20% lower risk of heart disease, 25% lower risk of heart attack, 26% lower risk of heart failure, stroke (31%), and cardiovascular death (27%).

What short-term effects can eating sugar have on our heart?

“If you have a lot of sugar at once, it can increase your blood pressure and increase your heart rate in the short-term,” says Dr Oliver Guttmann, consultant cardiologist at The Wellington Hospital, part of HCA Healthcare UK. “A big sugary meal, for example, can cause your heart rate to be a bit faster because your body has to work khd harder to manage the increased level of blood sugar.”

What are the long-term effects? Increased risk of heart disease:

“Over time, high sugar intake can cause chronic low-grade inflammation and high blood pressure, which can increase the risk of heart disease,” says Dr Guttmann.

Increased LDL cholesterol levels

“High consumption of sugar, especially refined sugars, can sometimes raise the level of the “bad” cholesterol LDL (low-density lipoprotein) over time and lower the level of the good cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein, HDL),” says Dr Guttmann. “High LDLs over time can harden the arteries.”

Weight gain & diabetes

“If you have a lot of sugar over prolonged periods, then there is a risk of obesity,” says Dr Guttmann. “A higher body weight can increase your risk of high cholesterol levels and blood pressure, which are major risk factors of type 2 diabetes. Additionally, high blood sugars over a long time can lead to insulin resistance and increase the risk of diabetes.”

Raised risk of strokes & heart attacks

Dr Guttmann says: “Furring makes the blood vessels tighter and more narrow over time.

“High blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking and family history are the main risk factors for furring – high sugar intake can worsen many of these things.”

What checks should we be doing?

“If you’re very fit and healthy and you don’t have any other medical problems, I think checking your blood pressure and your cholesterol once a year is reasonable,” says Dr Guttmann.

“However, if you have a history of high blood pressure or heart attacks in the family, or if you’re diabetic or if you smoke you should have it checked more frequently.”