Is sugar toxic?

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SUGAR isn't poisonous. But in the amounts we tend to eat, sugar can act a lot like poison.

Let's be clear about this. The sugar your body needs is glucose — the fuel for your brain and muscles. We get it naturally from rice, fruit, milk and vegetables. This is not the problem.

The real culprit is added sugar: the white sugar, corn syrup and sweeteners mixed into soda, bread, sauces, dressings and so-called "healthy snacks". The World

Health Organization recommends less than six teaspoons a day. Many of us get 3 to 4 times this amount daily without realizing it.

What happens when sugar enters our bodies that fast and that often? Your blood sugar spikes. Insulin surges to clear it. If you do this daily, your cells will soon start ignoring insulin. This is the first step to type 2 diabetes. Your liver turns the excess sugar into fat which could lead to inflammation, fatty liver, high blood pressure and gout. Other side effects are damaged blood vessels and the risk of heart disease.

The good news: you don't need to quit sugar forever. That slice of cake is not dangerous. You see, toxicity is about frequency and dose.

The key is fiber. For example, sweetened coffee and donuts before lunch is totally different from a serving of ice cream after a meal. Liquid sugar is the culprit because it hits your bloodstream with no fiber or protein as a buffer.

There is no need to give up sugar. You just need some practical tips.

Drink smart. Start with water before anything else. Swap soda, juices, milk tea and smoothies for fresh juices, unsweetened tea, black coffee or lemon water.

Eat to blunt the spike. Apply the "protein-fiber-fat rule". Have fish, lean meat, eggs and vegetables before rice or pasta.

Exercise daily. Do you know that a 10-minute walk after meals can bring down sugar by 30 percent ? The secret is to keep moving.

Shop smarter. Read the ingredients. If you see corn syrup, maltose or dextrose, do not buy it. Those first three ingredients means it's mostly sugar. Eat home cooked meals. It's safer. Manage cravings by drinking one glass of water. Wait 15 minutes for the craving to go away.

For those with kidney disease or diabetes, the margin is smaller. Pair limited carbs with protein and watch your portions. Your doctor can come up with a plan for you.

Sugar isn't evil. It is a condiment. It is not food. So treat it that way. Sugar once consumed needs to be burned. So, exercise is a must.

Choose whole food before processed options. Pick the whole fruit instead of the juice. Drink water, not soda.

If you make one change this week, then you will see positive results. In 10 days your taste buds will reset. Then suddenly, an apple tastes better than apple pie. Affirmation: "I am as sweet as honey."

Love and light.