



DIET & NUTRITION

# Avoid the sugar trap





## Meeta Lall

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### **It's not like you can't eat anything if you're diabetic. Eating right is not that difficult.**

Oh no! What am I going to eat now? This is a common reaction when people learn they have diabetes. Yet, eating right for diabetes is not as difficult as we think.

We know that in diabetes, blood sugar levels go haywire. Normally, sugar and starch in food are absorbed as glucose into our blood. Insulin, the hormone produced by pancreas, clears up glucose from the blood by directing it into the cells. In diabetes, because cells become resistant to insulin, glucose is unable to enter the cells and blood glucose levels remain high. Eating foods especially high in sugar or starch such as burgers, chips, cookies, coke, aloo-poori and jalebis complicates the situation.

Eating the right foods in the right amount at the right time is important to maintain blood sugar levels through the day. This will help you feel better and stay mentally sharp. You will

have better moods, less depression, and less fatigue than those who don't. This will also reduce the risk of complications such as high blood pressure, heart disease and cancer.

## **Sugar in the diet**

Ideally, sugar has no place in a diabetic's diet. Sugar has loads of calories but no nutrients or fibre. It is quickly absorbed into the blood and raises blood glucose levels dangerously.

We Indians like to add sugar to milk, tea, coffee, cold drinks (nimboo pani, thandai, iced tea, sherbets, even fresh juices). This increases the sugar load considerably. Avoid adding sugar to food and drink as such.

Sugar also disguises itself as honey, lactose, glucose, sucrose, maltose, dextrose, fructose, molasses, corn syrup, maple syrup, corn sweetener and juice concentrate in most processed foods. Read food labels carefully before buying processed foods.

You can safely opt for a sugary treat once in a while. It is far wiser to eat some dessert now and then rather than deprive yourself for weeks only to binge later. However, portion control is the key. So, don't feel guilty if you eat a slice of your favourite cake or a bowl of ice cream once in a while. But keep the portion small.

You may compensate by foregoing the same amount of calories from other foods so that the total caloric intake remains the same. Also, change your concept of dessert. A dessert need not always be buttery, creamy, or floating in thick syrup of sugar. Most Indian desserts are very sweet. Cultivate taste for delicately sweetened desserts. Try:

Serving cut up fresh fruit for dessert.

Adding dates, raisins, figs liberally. Cinnamon, cardamom and other spices add a zestful tang.

Gelatine-based desserts like jelly with fresh fruit are a healthy option.

Most diabetics happily give up sugar and start using sugar substitutes. Instead of regular Coke, we go in for the diet variety. We can now make sugar-free halwa, kheer and mithai ... Sadly, these sugar substitutes have far worse health effects upon the body than sugar itself.

## **Sugar substitutes**

Aspartame, the chemical used in sugar substitutes, has been linked with slow and silent damage to health. Used instead of sugar, aspartame can be found in more than 6,000 products including diet sodas, juices, jams, chewing gum, candy, sweets, chocolates and even fibre supplements, vitamins and some drugs!

Prolonged use has been known to cause Alzheimer's disease, brain tumours and Parkinson's disease in young people. Aspartame can cause depression, anxiety, dizziness, panic attacks,

nausea, irritability, loss of memory, lack of concentration and difficulty in reading and writing. Sucralose, the latest artificial sweetener, has been linked with poor blood sugar control, enlarged liver and kidneys, decreased red blood cell count, abortions, extended pregnancy and accelerated aging.

Other harmful sugar alternatives contain chemicals such as neotame, acesulfame-K or saccharin. Sadly, these sugar substitutes have far worse health effects upon the body than sugar itself.

Moreover, artificial sweeteners being 200 times sweeter than sugar do not reduce our natural craving for sugar or the “sweet tooth”. Ironically, they increase our craving for sugar and carbohydrates and may actually promote obesity.

It is best to avoid artificial sweeteners totally. While controlling our sweet tooth may be the best, though difficult, solution, health experts strongly recommend Stevia, a naturally found sweetening herb, as an ideal sweetener. It can be used in cooking, baking and frying.

*The writer, a nutrition and health researcher, is the author of The Power of N: Nutrition In Our Times.*

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### **Dos and don'ts**

To avoid sugar highs and sugar lows, diabetics should ...

Eat several (5-6) small meals in a day rather than three large meals.

Do not go more than three or four hours without eating.

Don't skip meals.

Eat at roughly the same time each day.

Watch your portion size.

Avoid any kind of dieting or diets.

Eat fewer foods high in sugar like fruit juices, fruit-flavoured drinks, sodas, and tea/coffee with sugar.

Use less salt in cooking and at the table.

Eat fewer foods that are high in salt, like canned and packaged soups, pickles, and processed meats.

Drink eight glasses of water each day to avoid dehydration which is particularly dangerous in people with diabetes.

Limit use of caffeine through tea/coffee/diet colas and also, alcohol.



The advertisement features a photograph of a woman's neck wearing a gold necklace with blue and white beads. To the right of the image is the Club Factory logo, which consists of the word 'CLUB' in white on a red square background, with 'FACTORY' in smaller white text below it. The main text of the ad reads 'Necklaces at Club Factory' in a bold, black font. To the right of this text, it says 'Get Up to 20%-70% Off. Buy Now!' in a smaller, grey font. In the top right corner of the ad, there are small blue icons for information and close. A white circular button is also visible on the right side of the ad.

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