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Satisfying That Old Sweet Tooth

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In a world where sweetness has become a lost art, we humans who need it for emotional survival, are constantly searching for sweet things and often we turn to the foods we eat for satisfaction. Think about it. We have less time for family, neighbors, and friends. We spend more time on the job working for people who care only about their bottom line and even if our jobs are okay we tend to work too much and play too little. Our friends are often more like acquaintances since we are all too busy to participate intimately in each others lives.

So our foods have become our sweetness and sadly our dependence on them is killing us. These “comfort foods” include donuts, bagels, breads, pastries, cereals, cookies, pasta, white rice, candy, and sweet drinks of all kinds. They give us a short burst of pleasure but in the long run they are torturing us and making us sick. While the aisles at our grocery stores grow with availability of these products our collective health is declining at an even faster rate.

Someone once said that sugar is to cancer, what fertilizer is to plants. Way back in 1957 Dr. William Coda Martin classified refined sugar as a poison because it has been depleted of its life forces, vitamins and minerals. For instance, sugar causes chromium and copper deficiencies and interferes with the absorption of calcium and magnesium. Study after study has confirmed that high consumption of sugar-laden food results in tooth decay and obesity among other things.

Sugar compromises the immune system, our very defense against internal confusion (cellular and hormonal overload) and external invaders (germs, viruses and bacteria). Sugar overtaxes the liver and pancreas and causes damage to the kidneys and adrenal glands. It weakens eyesight, reduces HDL (good cholesterol) and increases LDL and triglycerides. It also inhibits concentration, raises adrenaline levels, causes anxiety, and is a key ingredient in the increase of “road rage”. Sugar has been implicated in hypoglycemia, hormonal imbalance, varicose veins, food allergies, hypertension and depression, as well as cancer of the breasts, ovaries, intestines, prostate and rectum and a variety of other things too long to list here.

Should we switch to sugar alternatives? Let’s talk about some of the most popular ones for a minute. Aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal) is used extensively in foods and especially diet beverages yet consumption of aspartame has been connected to many health problems. In 1994 the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a list of 61 reported adverse reactions to aspartame, including: chest pains, asthma, arthritis, migraine headaches, insomnia, seizures, tremors, vertigo, and weight gain. The surprising item on the list is "weight gain," given that aspartame is the sweetener most often used in

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diet sodas. According to one study, aspartame may actually stimulate appetite, prompting cravings for calorie-rich carbohydrates.

A warning label that used to appear on Sweet’N Low, another sugar alternative stated, "Use of this product may be hazardous to your health. This product contains saccharin which has been determined to cause cancer in laboratory animals." Enough said.

Splenda, the newest sugar substitute, is actually chlorinated sugar, a chlorocarbon. James Bowen, M.D., A physician and biochemist, tells us that chlorocarbons can damage the liver and kidneys and affect the brain and nervous system as well as many other body systems including genetics and immune function.

Given these dangers, it is my humble contention that we should avoid all chemically created products and rely on Mother Earth for all foods. If something sugary is desired we can choose whole foods such as honey, pure maple syrup, rice bran syrup, or even raw sugar. The key is to remain as natural as possible and like our wise grandmothers always said, “Everything in moderation”.

I will add that the only sugar substitute appearing to be safe is Stevia, a noncaloric herb that is native to Paraguay. In his book *Stevia Sweet Recipes*, Jeffrey Goettemoeller has the following to say about it: "Stevia has undergone numerous toxicity tests. None of these tests have shown any harmful effects. Few substances can make this claim. The real test, though, was centuries of continuous use by natives of South America." This is no commercial for Stevia but the least refined versions do show some promise.

Frankly, it is my belief that we should be more interested in finding healthier habits and less interested in finding safe sugar alternatives. Consider eating fewer sugary foods, nurturing relationships and taking time for family, friends, neighbors, and ourselves. How about finding work, volunteer opportunities and hobbies that are rewarding and fun? How about simply working less? Increased dedication to these simple things will increase the sweetness in our lives and decrease our need for sugary foods. As for me, I think I’ll skip the dish of ice cream and take a nice walk by the lake. Mmmmmm, sweet!

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