

The Monster Metabolizer

HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP

BY BARBI WALKER

The hidden sugar better known as high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), commonly found in the packaged and processed foods we eat, is wreaking havoc on your waistline and your health – it is even affecting your internal organs. When HFCS enters your body, even in small amounts, it puts strain on your liver and begins a pattern of creating too much insulin, driving fat into the liver cells and causing weight gain – just a couple of the many health issues surrounding this sneaky little ingredient.

According to a peer-review study prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)¹, “the consumption of added sugars, which are sweeteners added to processed and prepared foods, has been associated with measures of cardiovascular disease risk among adolescents, including adverse cholesterol concentrations.”

HFCS AND YOUR BODY

HFCS is made from corn syrup that goes through a process to make some of the glucose from the corn into fructose (both sugars) as a sugar additive. Over the years it has become ubiquitous in

many processed foods and beverages. It is cheaper to use than cane sugar and is often added to breads, cereals, meats, yogurts and more.

The fructose component of sugar and HFCS is primarily metabolized by the liver, whereas glucose comes from sugar and starches that are metabolized by every cell within the body. When fructose and glucose (the two components of HFCS) are combined and consumed, the liver has to go into overtime to process this sugar – more so than if you’d eaten a potato. When you drink products like fruit juice or soda that contain HFCS, the fructose and glucose hit the liver quicker than if you’d eaten an apple or pear. The speed at which the liver has to work to process the sugar will also affect how it metabolizes the fructose and glucose.

High fructose corn syrup has come under attack in the last few years because studies about obesity and diabetes have shown that not all sugars are created equal. Robert Lustig, MD, pediatric endocrinologist professor of pediatrics at the Benioff Children’s Hospital at University of California at San Francisco (UCSF), has referred to HFCS as both a “toxin” and a “poison,” and refers to



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...not all sugars are created equal

the processing of these different types of sugars as “isocaloric” and “isometabolic.” In other words, if we eat 100 calories of glucose from a starchy food like rice and 100 calories of HFCS from a soda, each food will be metabolized quite differently and have a different health effect on the body – the same number/amount of calories consumed with entirely different metabolic results. Lustig puts both kinds of sugar on trial – the sweet, powdery, granular ingredient we put in coffee and the maligned HFCS, which he calls “the most demonized additive known to man.” In the HBO documentary, “The Weight of the Nation” Lustig says about 13 percent of school-age children have nonalcoholic fatty livers due to their diets.

The *New York Times* journalist Gary Taubes also points out the unique breakdown of high fructose corn syrup, and states that it has “a near 50-50 combination of the two different carbohydrates: glucose and fructose.” He says biochemists have worked for over 50 years to show that some of the fructose is converted into fat which accumulates in the liver and begins the process of insulin resistance, which over time will lead to elevated insulin levels... the beginning stages of type 2 diabetes.

WHERE TO START CUTTING?

HFCS is just one of the main ingredients that Kelly Jackson, MS, RD, educator and lecturer at the University of Arizona, says you should eliminate from your diet. Jackson says the best way to

avoid it is to eat food that is closer to its natural state, and read labels carefully, especially on any processed, prepackaged product you purchase.

Surprisingly, bread often is the number one culprit of HFCS, followed by cereals and canned items. The next step is to complete a quick Internet search for foods with high fructose corn syrup and see what you normally buy that ends up on the list. From there, it's just a matter of finding replacements for those items – in no time, you will be HFCS-free! ■

1. “Consumption of Added Sugar Among U.S. Children and Adolescents 2005-2008”, a peer-review comprised of medical doctors and researchers.

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