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IS YOUR GREEN JUICE MAKING YOU FAT

WE'VE BEEN PROGRAMMED to think that fat equals fat and the weight loss equation is all about calories in versus calories out. But the word to fear most may actually be sugar. Sure, you're well aware of obvious sugar-laden beverages, from regular soda to energy drinks, crucified incessantly in the media as research continues to link their over-consumption to the obesity epidemic. And you steer clear of sweets, the dessert menu and the simple-carb-filled bread basket, whose contents' inevitable fate is to turn into sugar. Yet it's the stealth sugar often lurking in seemingly healthy foods – green juices, whole wheat bread (yes, whole wheat), yogurt with fruit, granola, almond milk, coconut water, marinara sauce and condiments like ketchup and fat-free balsamic vinaigrette – that can cause the amount you consume to skyrocket. These sugars not only exacerbate weight gain, especially belly fat, but they also contribute to mood problems such as depression and the inability to focus, as well as fatigue, gas, bloating and inflammation. “Most people know that eating sweet, sugary food is not healthy,” says Dubai-based nutrition and metabolic balance coach, Stephanie Pech. “They think that by choosing low fat and whole wheat products they're making the right choice, but don't realise that healthy fats such as avocado, nuts and cold pressed oils will actually help them to lose weight. It's the hidden sugar in low-fat products that's the problem.”

That's why the World Health Organisation recently proposed cutting its recommended total intake of added sugars for adults in half, to about 25 grams a day (six teaspoons). First, to be clear: we need sugar. “Without glucose the brain cannot function and survive,” says Caroline Bienert, Dubai-based qualified nutritional therapist and detox expert. “It's vital for all the physical processes of our bodies.” However, not all sugar is created equal. An apple has a substantial amount of sugar naturally (on average, about 19 grams) in the form of fructose, but it's also packed with phytonutrients and fiber, which essentially counteract the negative effects its inherent sweetness may have and which is why eating fresh fruit is fair game. But drinking apple juice

(or eating foods laced with its concentrate) is like mainlining pure sugar without reaping the nutritional benefits of the fruit itself. And what happens when fructose isn't piggybacked by fibre? It makes a beeline for your liver and kick-starts the production of fat.

As for glucose, “it's an ambivalent thing: it's a necessary energy source for all activities. But you only need a certain amount. Taken in too high dosage and without enough movement of your body, it becomes fat instantly,” says Caroline. When your body is in a constant state of glucose overload, insulin levels are elevated too, which triggers the production of leptin, the appetite-suppressing hormone.

Unfortunately, the body can develop a resistance to leptin, and the next thing you know, you think you're starving and need more energy (a.k.a. sugary food). Along with affecting insulin and leptin levels and causing your body to hold on to fat, sugar has calories (about 16 for every teaspoon). “We are so used to drinking sodas and sweetened beverages daily, we're not aware of the damage it's causing in the long run,” says Caroline. “Our bodies can't take so much simple sugar and we become bigger and bigger and sicker and sicker.”

So back to your daily juice-joint habit. Reality check: a carrot-beet-orange medley or mostly green veggie cocktail with apples and pineapple could contain in the ballpark of 50 grams of sugar, more if it's spiked with agave syrup, a high-fructose bomb. Instead, to cut the bitter taste of nothing but blended kale and spinach, try adding fresh mint, cucumber and best of all, lemon and/or lime. “The acidity of lemons and limes neutralises the bitterness of spinach or kale beautifully,” says Wiebke Katsoudas, managing director of the UAE juice cleanse, Essentially. “To add a hint of sweetness, you can also add a low-fructose fruit such as a tangy green apple or a couple of kiwis.” Her recipe for a healthy green juice: One cup of kale leaves (without the stem), one cup of spinach, one large cucumber, one organic green apple, quarter of a cup of fresh mint, one stick of celery, juice of one small lime or half a lemon and one small piece of ginger. Enjoy, guilt free. ■



Hidden sugar in so-called healthy drinks and food could be sabotaging your weight. Bazaar reveals the not-so-sweet truth