

'A Spoonful of Sugar' Makes Self-Control Go Down

As a CrossFit coach and fitness writer, people often ask me about my diet. Questions such as, *Are you Paleo? Do you do "The Zone?" Do you eat gluten? What do you think of juicing? What do you eat before and after you work out? Do you eat carbs?*

Recently, one of the athletes I coach asked me if I ever eat sugar. (For the purposes of this post, "sugar" refers to the added sugars found in cereals, sweets, and Starbucks drinks, not those that occur naturally in fruits, honey, even some vegetables like beets and carrots.) I replied, "Very, very rarely. But that's just me."

This answer probably seems strange, considering that it opposes a ubiquitous health mantra that I fully embrace: "everything in moderation." So why, when it comes to my personal nutrition, am I staunchly anti-sugar?

For me, and maybe you, too, sugar is a highly addictive substance, much like liquor to an alcoholic or the "next fix" to a junkie.

Everyone has a weakness, an area of vulnerability by which we can, if unprepared and undefended, fall victim to the lusts of our flesh and eyes, or prey to the enemy's promised attacks (1 John 2:16, 1 Peter 5:8). For some it's alcohol. For others it's sex, gambling, pornography, or a combination of several. For my father (and others on his side of the family), it was food.

Despite his vast knowledge of health and proper nutrition as a physician, as well as his personal discipline as an avid bodybuilder for most of his life, my dad struggled with his weight. Along with his hypothyroidism, he felt that much of

his food addiction stemmed from his DNA. And I believe him because I too experience unusual cravings for more sugar after just a few bites of something particularly sweet, such as ice cream, cake, or chocolate.

Dopamine is one of our “feel-good” neurotransmitters, largely responsible for our motivation and reward systems. Typically, drug-seeking behavior will cause dopamine levels to rise in our brains even before the “drug” is actually consumed. In other words, merely anticipating the forthcoming sensation is pleasurable!

In studies, sugar-addicted rats ingest the white stuff in a binge-like manner that releases dopamine in the nucleus accumbens (the part of the brain that influences sensations of reward, pleasure, laughter, and addiction) during and right before consumption, much like heroin use in humans.

Also like drug addiction, sugar bingeing causes changes in the expression and availability of dopamine receptors in the brain: the next “high” will require *even more* sugar to achieve the same effect. It’s been proven recently that those with sugar addictions and compulsive eating habits actually have fewer D2 dopamine receptors, meaning their bodies tell them they need more stimulation—more sugar—to feel satisfied. (Check out this [link](#) to learn more about sugar addiction and how to overcome it.)

I often feel rude for turning down the offer of dessert, especially if a friend or family member has worked hard to prepare it. For those who are blessed without this sugary thorn in their side, I know it must be hard to understand why I, and others like me, can’t “just stop after a few bites,” after just “a spoonful of sugar.”

I envy people like my mom, brother, and husband who satisfy their sweet tooth with a few harmless nibbles of a chocolate chip cookie or a single sliver of pumpkin pie. They get “their

fix," then forget about it.

Until I receive my glorified body up above and am seated at the Wedding Feast before a banquet of food that is quite literally out of this world, I will continue to ask for and employ a *spiritual* kind of nourishment—the fruit of the Spirit—to defy my DNA and say “No more!” after an appropriate amount of gustatory decadence.

So, that’s the long answer to the question, “Do you eat sugar?” I hope this post will also help the bakers and pastry chefs among you to not take it personally when friends pass on your delectable treats. Food, I believe, can be just as much of a stronghold as any other addictive substance, and many are fighting a battle you’re not aware of.

I’m praying now against all of the countless things we wrestle with, from alcohol and drugs to food and shopping, even junk TV. Whatever we do, whatever we eat and drink, let it all be for God’s glory.

With Him, we can have victory over *any* addiction. Let us remember that the same resurrection power of the Holy Spirit that lifted Christ from the grave and seated Him at the Father’s right hand has been given to each of us who have made Jesus Savior and Lord. He wants to do more than guarantee your salvation for tomorrow. He wants to set your body free today.

“Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard” (Isaiah 58:8, NIV).

Stay fit and stay faithful.

Diana Anderson-Tyler is the author of Creation House’s *Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman’s Guide to Total Fitness*. Her popular website can be found at [www.dianataylor.com](#) and she is the owner and a coach at CrossFit 925. Diana can be reached on Facebook and Twitter.

