

WRITING SAMPLE

Is Sugar Really Toxic?

By Alyssa O'Sullivan

Anyone who's stepped out into the world in the past fifty years knows that sweets are not the healthiest portion of our diets (duh), but recent trends on social media and in nutrition books have been shouting a new, more radical view – sugar is 'poison'.

Now don't go on a rampage knocking birthday cakes out of little kids' hands – let's talk about this rationally.

If you've paid even a few minutes' attention to nutrition, or the back of cereal boxes, you've probably seen the famous Food Pyramid and noticed that your favorite cakes and cookies make up that tiny little bit at the top – the 'use sparingly' spot. The common understanding has been that sweets are empty calories – something we fill up on because it tastes good, and therefore miss out on healthier calories. Plus, there's the whole tooth decay thing – yeah, we've known sugar is not the secret to health for years now. But, poison? Really?

This radical sugar theory gained popularity after Dr Robert Lustig, a childhood obesity specialist and pediatric endocrinologist at UC San Francisco, gave a lecture entitled "Sugar: The Bitter Truth" that went viral on YouTube. His repetition of 'poison,' 'toxic' and 'evil,' referring to sugar, caused many families to cut all added sugars from their diets. Many report improved health and a disappearance of sugar cravings after months of cutting out sugar. Sounds pretty good, but let's hear more about this 'poison' idea.

Lustig claims that sugar is something that's killing us, similar to cigarettes and alcohol. So what does Lustig say sugar does to us? Well, he's looking at the metabolic consequences of fructose (a component of sugar). High

concentrations of this carbohydrate put your liver to work. Tests on lab rats have shown that excessive fructose processed in the liver converts into fat and results in insulin resistance (think: obesity).

It sounds startling, but critics of Lustig claim that these findings are merely suggestive, and that these results come from fructose levels way above average consumption.

Atkins is on the sugar-hating trend as well, claiming that fructose leads to mood swings, heart disease risk and aging (Oh my!). Families on the 'no-sugar' diet do claim to notice higher energy levels and better immune systems during flu season.

Dr Adrian Cozma, lead author of a recent study on fructose by St Michael's Hospital, claims that our attention needs to be brought back to the concept of moderation. She means, stop with the fructose slander. Plus, the American College of Sports Medicine's 2012 study claims that a high intake of fructose for active athletes has more benefits than harm.

You've probably felt the effects of a sugar rush and the resulting 'crash,' so you know how your body reacts to sugar. Considering all angles, your best bet is to monitor your diet – watch out for added sugar like syrups and try to balance your sugar intake with an active lifestyle.

So is sugar toxic? In a way, yes, but at extreme levels. Monitoring and moderation are your main tools. Research is still vague, but paying attention to your diet and avoiding too many 'temporary sugar highs' is a good strategy, no matter what side of the debate you sit on.

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