

SCIENCE & WELLNESS

Can Sugar Make Our Kids Depressed?

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Our kids love sugar. When they have an ice cream cone, piece of candy, or slice of birthday cake, they sure seem like they are on top of the world. But a new study published in [Scientific Reports](#) explores how sugar may actually make us sad and depressed.

We have been warned by health professionals for years that added sugar can lead to health problems like diabetes, heart disease, obesity, allergies, and even anxiety. Experts wanted to explore the relationship between sugar and depression because they were seeing a trend of rising sugar intake along with increased cases of mental disorders throughout the world. Americans, for example, are consuming three times the amount of added sugars recommended by the [World Health Organization](#) (this does not include sugars found naturally in fruit, vegetables, and milk).

In this study, researchers used sugar intake from sweet food and drinks to try to predict mood disorders in participants. They tracked the diets and medical conditions of 8,000 people over 22 years using surveys about their diet and doctors' visits. Reviewing what they ate and the types of medical conditions they were treated for helped the researchers to deduce any connection between sugar intake and health issues.

They found that men without a mood disorder who consumed over 67 grams of sugar per day had a 23 percent increased risk of suffering from a mood disorder within a five-year period compared to those who ate 40 grams or less. It is important to understand how much 67 grams of sugar is – about six donuts or three chocolate bars. So, that is quite a bit of sugar for one person! It is also 25 percent higher than the daily recommendation. According to the American Heart Association, children ages two to 18 should not eat or drink more than 25 grams of added sugar daily, which is about six teaspoons.

The connection between sugar and depression appeared quickly during the first five-year survey and remained pretty steady throughout the study. This risk was independent of other factors like their socioeconomic status, physical activity, drinking, smoking, other eating habits, body fat, and physical health. They also found that men and women with a mood disorder who ate a lot of sugar had a higher risk of feeling depressed again five years later compared to those who had less sugar.

They then looked at whether having a mood disorder would make people more apt to choose sweets. They found no evidence of a reverse effect in which participants upped their sugar intake after suffering from a mood disorder. So, people were not just eating more sugar because they were bummed out.

Other recent studies have explored the link between sugar and depression. A 2002 study from the journal *Depression and Anxiety* found that higher rates of refined sugar consumption were associated with higher rates of depression in the six countries explored. In a 2014 study researchers found that sugar-sweetened and artificially sweetened drinks could increase one's risk of feeling depressed. Finally, in 2015 a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found greater chances of depression in people who consumer a high level of added sugar, but not in those with a high intake of naturally occurring sugars.

Although experts are not quite ready to conclude that sugar causes depression, these multiple studies certainly raise concern. The best advice is to stick to the sugar intake recommendations and to be mindful of the amount of sugar your children are consuming on a daily basis. The tricky part is that sugar can sneak up on us. It is added in foods you would never dream of. Be sure to check the nutrition labels of bread, yogurt, cereal, salad dressing, ketchup, salty snacks, smoothies, and granola bars. Also, be very careful with drinks. About a third of our sugar consumption comes from beverages. Juices, soda, and even energy drinks are packed with added sugar. Before you know it, your kids could be consuming that 67 gram mark!



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