



Beating addictions

Caffeine, Chocolate, Alcohol, Sugar...

“All the things we really like are either immoral, illegal or fattening“

We know that foods can directly affect brain chemicals. We also know that foods can affect our blood sugar levels and stimulate the production of certain hormones like adrenaline. The combination of all of these facts makes many foods highly addictive.

An indication of the strength of the impact that a certain food might have on your body can be measured by the symptoms you would experience when those foods are withdrawn.

With this article I would like to show what actually happens to us bio chemically when our body has to `handle` different substances like caffeine, chocolate, alcohol and sugar.

Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant; it raises levels of adrenaline and cortisol even when consumed in moderate doses. These are the same two hormones that we overproduce when faced with stressful situations. So what happens when we drink coffee because we feel stressed? Well let's make that a `double shot`.

Because caffeine removes water from your body it is classed a diuretic. As a consequence your hydration levels will be significantly reduced leading to a higher salt content in your body that in turn can then lead to fluid retention in your cells. Swollen ankles or hands are usually the first sign of fluid retention due to dehydration, but you will also notice physical fatigue, loss of concentration or the inability to sleep.

Sources of caffeine are coffee, tea, chocolate, Coke, certain energy drinks, headache medication and painkillers.

Caffeine also prevents the absorption of some essential nutrients like zinc and iron that are necessary for energy production.

Healthier choices:

There are many substitute drinks like chicory or barley coffee.
Replace every other cup of coffee with a cup of hot water and a slice of lemon.
Drink lots of water and allow yourself to experience increased energy levels.

Chocolate

Chocolate contains some interesting compounds that can have a significant impact on your brain chemistry. It suppresses beta waves that are linked to alertness and raises alpha waves that have a more calming effect on the body. This may be the reason why chocolate is so addictive for some people.

Most chocolate is also very high in sugar, so if you really can't imagine life without chocolate then choose a bar that has at least 70% cocoa solids, as this will be much lower in sugar. And there is even a source of magnesium and antioxidants in the dark chocolate.

Healthier choices:

Try eating dried fruit

Dip different fruits into melted chocolate and eat as a treat.

Choose chocolate with at least 70 % cocoa solids.

Alcohol

Alcohol stimulates those stress hormones again and therefore the effect on blood sugar and brain chemicals is to be taken seriously. It is also a diuretic. It can trigger the desire to eat more and since alcohol only delivers `empty calories` it means that overall alcohol consumption can easily contribute to weight gain or to be more precise to excessive body fat stores, as the energy in alcohol can only be stored as body fat. Unlike other nutrients the body in its elementary state cannot utilize alcohol.

Healthier choices:

Try and develop a strategy like drinking a glass of wine followed by a glass of water.

Try alcohol free beer or wine.

Find an enjoyable activity to occupy your mind in those `crucial moments`

For every bottle of alcohol not consumed put money into a holiday `piggy bank` and watch it grow fast.

Sugar

“Sugar is not only a drug, it's a poison “

Dr. W. Coda Martin, 1957

Refined sugar is depleted of all its life forces, vitamins and minerals. The body cannot utilize it effectively and as a result a pyruvic acid accumulates in the brain and abnormal sugars accumulate in the red blood cells. These cells then simply can't absorb sufficient oxygen to survive and die.

This is the scientific explanation why sugar makes you age quicker. The autonomic nervous system is affected because processed sugar is a powerful stimulant to the sympathetic branch of the nervous system which is responsible for the release of stress hormones by increasing heart rate and blood pressure whilst decreasing digestive and repair processes.

So all in all refined sugars can create a huge stress on your body and therefore lead to noticeable imbalances in mind and body.

Healthier choices:

Avoid processed foods like biscuits, crisps or cakes.

Cut back on alcohol.

Don't eat `white`, always choose wholemeal or wholegrain options.

**“Every positive change you make today
will inch you closer to a better tomorrow.”**

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