

Fat is not the culprit

ALMOST every woman has had experience with sugar cravings and understands just how difficult they are to overcome. There is a relatively simple way of dealing with them in a manner that won't feel remotely like deprivation ...

Carbohydrates are the only macronutrient (carbs, proteins and fats) able to alter blood sugar. This is because their starches break down very quickly into sugars in the body and are used as an immediate energy source. In the good old days we, as women, were far more physically active through our day and our choice of carbohydrate would have been a whole grain (let's say a bread that you milled and then baked yourself from coarse wholegrain flour). However, these days we are a pretty sedentary species and our carb choice tends to be one of convenience and thus a processed one (e.g. supermarket bread, juices, crackers, muffins).

These processed carbs are broken down much more rapidly into sugar than their wholegrain counterparts, playing havoc with blood sugar levels, particularly in those who aren't active. When blood sugar becomes high, insulin is released, resulting in a signal to various cells to 'open' to receive this excess glucose (this is a failsafe mechanism to combat the damaging, and even fatal, effects of having too much sugar in the blood). Your muscle cells and liver are probably already topped up with fuel from your previous meal (except if you exercised at a relatively high intensity after your last meal), so the cells most likely to take this excess fuel are the fat cells (converting the glucose into fat very swiftly). So – every time you eat a meal that's high in carbohydrates (in particular, processed carbs or even high-starch wholegrains), you are setting yourself up for body fat storage. Not only that, but high sugar-release carbohydrates also result in a release of serotonin (our 'feel-good' hormone), but they fall short on supplying adequate fuel because they are 'burnt up' so quickly. Our brain's subsequent cry for more fuel is ironically perceived as a need for more carbo-



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hydrates (due to the resulting serotonin release) and so – when we respond with carbohydrates – we perpetuate a vicious cycle.

Now, because women have been made to fear fats (and are advised to consume so little of them) and certain proteins (such as animal meats), they tend to be overlooked when the choice is made for a healthy meal/snack. Proteins and fats actually control blood sugar levels very effectively by 'dampening' the rising blood sugar. This is a concept that many women struggle to understand. Decades of mainstream media influence and resulting social perception has resulted in a misunderstanding that it is fat that causes excess body fat storage. While certain fats should be avoided at all costs, such as trans fatty acids and hydrogenated fats (both found in processed and fried foods), others are extremely beneficial to health, assuming that you use a high quality product (with fats, use organic versions, particularly animal fats like butter). As mentioned, when you consume a meal or snack that consists of protein, fat and carbohydrate, the proteins and fats act to suppress the potential blood sugar spike, ensuring that you don't produce the high insulin levels that lead to fat storage or sugar cravings.

In summary, the best way to stay lean and healthy is to avoid or eliminate altogether any processed carbohydrates and to eat some form of good-quality protein and fat with every meal (or snack). Once you start following these principles, you should start to see a big difference in emotional stability (no more mood swings), increased energy and a reduction in sweet cravings.

Next time you have a sugar craving, eat some protein and/or fat and then wait 20 minutes to see if the craving abates.