

Giving Up Sugar? Here's What to Eat Instead.

By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author

Now that New Year has come and gone many of us are desperately trying to reach our New Year's goals. Giving up sugar is a popular resolution that is often made while eating something loaded with sugar like a cupcake or bon bon or while we are toasting the new year with a sugary drink. Most of us want to give up sugar because we know too much sugar contributes to weight gain, it puts us at risk of developing diseases like heart disease and diabetes, and it can contribute to cavities. But, how do we give up something that tastes so amazing and delicious? Is there anything we can eat or do to decrease our sugar cravings? Here are some tips that help me:

Drink water – Mild dehydration can be confused with hunger. Try drinking a glass of water if you are craving sugar. Stay hydrated throughout the day to keep cravings away. If you are choosing other beverages that contain water, of course choose non-sugary beverages!

Eat fresh fruit (and veggies) – I'm not sure I would be able to cut out processed sugar if it wasn't for fresh fruit. I have found that eating some fruit after dinner takes away cravings for more processed and sugary desserts. There are natural sugars in both fruits and veggies, but they are packed in a lot of water and provide other nutrients like fiber, minerals and vitamins. Fresh fruit and veggies also provide valuable antioxidants that can help reduce inflammation.

Take away the choice – If you are given the choice between a chocolate chip cookie and an apple, which do you think you would take? It is much harder to choose fruit if there are sugary, processed alternatives.

We simply don't have sweets in our home. We sometimes choose sweets when we are out, but not having them at home makes a huge difference.

Practice Mindfulness – A recent study showed that people who followed a mindful practice for only two weeks had significantly fewer cravings for chocolate. Mindfulness helps decrease stress and tiredness, both of which increase cravings for sugar.

Don't go hungry – When we are hungry we have more cravings. And the hungrier we are, the less disciplined we seem to be. Fill yourself up with snacks like fruits, nuts and yogurt and you will be less likely to grab the Oreos, Snickers and Pop Tarts. Choosing snacks with protein (i.e. nuts, yogurt, cheese) helps maintain your blood sugar so you won't be as hungry.

Consider honey or maple syrup – In an anti-inflammatory diet, sugar is one of the first things to be taken out because it is so inflammatory. Honey or maple syrup, in small quantities is considered acceptable. I don't eat a lot, but I do put honey in my tea in the morning and will occasionally use maple syrup as a sweetener in recipes.

Get some sleep – Do you find that you are more likely to eat sweets when you are tired? Studies show that sleep deprived people reach for sweet, processed foods more than healthy whole foods.

Move – A recent study showed that short bouts of intense walking decreased people's sugar cravings. If you are having a case of the mid-afternoon sugar cravings try going for a walk around your office instead. You may be pleasantly surprised that the cravings will go away.

Check out this week's recipe: Yogurt Parfait with Fruit and Nuts and a small amount of honey (optional). A great treat for breakfast or a snack that will remove the sugar cravings instantly!

