

less sugar, please!

Instead of policing your child's sugar intake, try these tactics to help her crave it less.

by Marygrace Taylor

Kids love sugar. Like, *really* love it. They're pretty much hardwired to: Experts think the preference may have developed to ensure babies accepted breast milk, which is sweet, or to help draw kids to the calories they need for their rapid growth. That's great if that means they only want fruit and milk, which have naturally occurring sugars and other health benefits—but that's not the case. Kids are just as likely (if not more so!) to want the supersweet, empty-calorie treats. And unfortunately, it's that added sugar that can lead to obesity, diabetes, and more.

So even if you say no to soda and unhealthy treats, it's tough to face your kid's biological desire for sweet stuff, because sugar is everywhere—and you may not want to go without *any* dessert. Here's how you can help your child curb her cravings:

Shop—and cook—smarter

Packaged, processed foods have more sugar than their homemade counterparts, and can enhance your child's preference for sweet tastes. "Sugar creates blood sugar, mood, and energy imbalances," says Peggy Kotsopoulos, a holistic nutritionist and author of *Must Have Been Something I Ate: The Simple Connection Between What You Eat and How You Look and Feel*. "It has addictive properties: It gives us an immediate energy high, and once the high goes away, we want more." Even store-bought foods that aren't thought of as sweet, like tomato sauce or salad dressing, are typically loaded with sugar (a half-cup serving of store-bought pasta sauce boasts almost twice as much sugar as most homemade versions). The fix? Cook more foods from scratch when you can, or choose

products without added sugar, like plain yogurt instead of flavored. If your child doesn't like the taste, try adding your own sugar and gradually decreasing the amount—it's likely still less than what's in a processed variety. Plus, research shows kids will get used to the less-sweet flavor.

Serve crave-curbing foods

When your child consumes a sugary food or drink, his pancreas releases high levels of the hormone insulin and within a half hour, the sugar is absorbed into the bloodstream; once insulin levels dip back down, he starts craving more sugar. But fiber-rich foods like whole grains, beans, and vegetables can "act as sponges to absorb excess blood sugar," keeping insulin levels stable and preventing sugar cravings, says Kotsopoulos. Whole fruit, too, can help: Even though it's high in natural sugar, fruit's fiber can slow the body's absorption of sugar (and satisfy your child's desire for something sweet).

Don't forbid treats

Too much sugar isn't healthy, but as with all things forbidden, actively restricting sweets could make your child want them even more, says Annie Sasseville, a Denver-based pediatric dietitian. Sasseville doesn't restrict sweets with her 5-year-old daughter, Jolie, but creates a sugar-moderate environment by keeping just a few treats (free of colors and dyes) in the house. "We have cookies in the kitchen, and sometimes Jolie asks for them excessively, but most of the time, she doesn't," Sasseville says. "I think it's okay to let her have the cookies, but let her know that she has to fill her belly with nutritious food first." ●

