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# Sweet and unhealthy?

## The role of sweets in Ayurveda Part II

Sugar is a real all-rounder, it has an appetizing, flavour-enhancing, nourishing, uplifting and calming effect on the mind. It is not for nothing that we crave sweets in particularly stressful phases.

We grow up with sweets from birth, because mother's milk also has a sweet taste, which nourishes and builds up the baby in the Kapha phase of its life.

We find sweets wherever carbohydrates are present, such as in fruit, but also in rice, potatoes, cereals and many other foods. The sugar is not simply in crystalline form, such as in household sugar, but cleverly packaged in chemical structures, which the body then breaks down into tiny pieces using its enzymes.

Carbohydrates are one of the main sources of energy in the human body. Their digestion begins in the mouth, where enzymes such as amylase start to break down starch. This is one of the reasons why it is so important to chew sufficiently (at least 20 times): To make the body's digestive work easier and to offer the stomach well-crushed and salivated ingredients. A point that is often neglected in our hectic times and causes many digestive complaints.

These digestive processes continue in the stomach and intestines. There, the carbohydrates are broken down further into their individual sugar molecules and absorbed via the small intestine. The absorbed sugars then travel via the bloodstream to the liver, where they are processed further. The pancreas produces the hormone insulin, which regulates the transport of glucose into the cells and promotes the absorption of glucose from the bloodstream. Some of this absorbed glucose is stored in the liver and muscle cells as glycogen.

Glycogen serves as a short-term energy store and can be quickly converted into glucose when needed to meet the body's energy requirements. Excess glucose that is not immediately used as energy can be converted into fat molecules and stored in adipose tissue.

Diets such as the famous Atkins diet, in which the amount of carbohydrates is drastically reduced and fat consumption is greatly increased in return, are constantly circulating with the aim of rapid weight loss. Under certain conditions, such as extremely low carbohydrate intake, the body can begin to convert fatty acids in the liver into ketone bodies, which can then serve as an alternative source of energy for the brain and other tissues. However, this is not a good long-term option, as our bodies function primarily on glucose, with our brains alone consuming around 20% of our daily intake! And most people don't enjoy it either.

In Ayurveda, dietary recommendations are based on the constitution and personal imbalance. For example, if a person suffers from a strong Kapha excess with too much weight, a reduction in sweet, sour and salty foods is recommended, as well as a reduction in white foods such as rice, yoghurt, cheese and cereals. In other words, all foods with a rather high carbohydrate content.

Ayurveda therefore also regulates food, but this is based more on the qualities of food and its taste rather than on nutritional tables, which encourages an intuitive approach to food.

However, an intuitive diet is often not so easy, as the industry uses hidden sugars, salt and fats that activate the brain's reward center and literally undermine healthy decisions.

## Recognizing sugar traps when shopping

Ayurveda recommends a natural, regional and seasonal diet, preferably of organic quality, i.e. as few processed and packaged products as possible.

These should make up the smallest part of the shopping basket and should be chosen carefully. Recognizing sugar traps in the supermarket requires attention when reading food labels and a conscious selection of products:

1. **Read the ingredients list:** The ingredients list on the packaging will tell you what ingredients are in a product. Look out for terms such as „sugar", „glucose", „fructose", „syrup", „dextrose" and other sugar-like terms. The higher up such a term is in the list of ingredients, the more of it the product contains.

2. **Look out for different names for sugar:** Sugar can appear under many different names. Some examples are corn syrup, maple syrup, molasses, agave syrup, rice syrup and honey.

3. **Cthe nutritional value:** look at the „Nutritional information" section on the packaging. Note the „of which sugar" or „sugar" section. A rough rule of thumb is that 4 grams of sugar equals about one teaspoon.

**4. Watch out for processed foods:** Processed foods such as ready meals, snacks, breakfast cereals, ketchup, sauces, dressings and fruit yogurts almost invariably contain hidden sugars. Instead, choose whole foods such as fresh fruit, vegetables and wholegrain products.

**5. Be careful with supposedly „healthy" products:** Some foods marketed as „healthy" or „all-natural" can still contain high levels of sugar. Always check labels to make sure you're making the right choice.

**6. Compare products:** Compare similar products from different brands to find the product with the lowest sugar content. Some brands offer low-sugar or sugar-free alternatives.

**7. Choose unprocessed foods:** focus on unprocessed foods such as fresh fruit, vegetables, seeds, nuts, pulses and whole grains. These generally have a lower sugar content.

**8. Cook for yourself:** Preparing meals at home gives you control over the ingredients and sugar content. This way you can ensure that no hidden sources of sugar are added.

**9. Note the portion size:** The portion size on the packaging can influence the sugar content. Make sure you take the portion size into account to correctly estimate the actual sugar content.

not a good idea and why you are causing long-term damage to your gut and your microbiome. Some people react to substitutes such as sorbitol with flatulence, heartburn and diarrhea, but are unable to pinpoint their symptoms. In addition to the classic triggers, such as lactose intolerance, it is always worth looking at sugar substitutes and removing them completely from your diet, at least for a while, and observing whether digestive complaints subside as a result.

**First of all, however, it is important to distinguish sweeteners from sugar substitutes.**

Sweeteners have 30-3000 times more sweetening power than sugar and contain almost no calories. They are particularly common in soft drinks and fitness products such as shakes and flavored protein powders. In the EU, 12 sweeteners are permitted, most of which can be recognized by their E numbers on the label:

- Acesulfame K (E 950)
- Aspartame (E 951)
- Cyclamate (E 952)
- Saccharin (E 954)
- Sucralose (E 955)
- Thaumatin (E 957)
- Neohesperidin DC (E 959)
- Steviol glycosides from stevia (E 960a) – usually best tolerated

- Enzymatically produced steviol glycosides (E 960c)
- Neotame (E 961)
- Aspartame-acesulfame salt (E 962)
- Advantam (E 969)

Sugar substitutes, i.e. sugar alcohols, also known as polyols, which are often used in diabetic products and in sweets and chewing gum, must be distinguished from these. Examples of sugar alcohols are sorbitol, xylitol, erythritol, mannitol and lactitol. These compounds have a similar sweetening power to sugar, but contain fewer calories and often have less influence on blood sugar levels. They are absorbed in the small intestine and fermented by intestinal bacteria, which can cause flatulence and diarrhoea in the event of intestinal colonization or intolerance.

**You may encounter the following substances in food:**

- Sorbitol (E 420)
- Mannitol (E 421)
- Isomalt (E 953)
- Maltitol (E 965)
- Lactitol (E 966)
- Xylitol (E 967)
- Erythritol (E 968)
- Polyglycitol syrup (E 964)

To identify all of these substances when shopping, you should take a close look at the label and, if you are unsure, check the product using an app such as “Code Check” by scanning the barcode (also works very well for household products and cosmetics). Substances of concern are displayed immediately, which makes healthier shopping much easier and sharpens your awareness of artificial additives.

An Ayurvedic-oriented diet relies on natural foods that do justice to your own constitution and digestive power (Agni). Artificial products containing E-numbers with sweeteners, colorants, emulsifiers and preservatives are not part of this and disrupt the healthy functioning of the intestines in the long term. We therefore recommend that you avoid these as far as possible and, in the event of digestive disorders, try to avoid them for at least 30 days. You are also welcome to support your intestines with a homemade detox tea and regular detox days.

Health can be simple, in that we sometimes simply leave out more instead of adding more and listen to our body, which usually knows exactly what is good for it and what is not.

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