

NOT-SO SWEET

Sure, that chai latte and those cupcakes are delish, but put them down, because too much sugar can spell serious trouble for your skin.

Put away the pick ‘n’ mix and hand over the Haribo: We know you’re aware of how bad sugar is for your health, but here’s the next big reason to ditch it from your diet. Overloading on sweet treats is actually one of the most ageing things you can do for your skin. It’s true, and here’s the boffin-based reason why...

When we eat sugar, it metabolises into glucose. Too much of that in our system reacts with the skin’s supporting structure of collagen and elastin, causing something called cell glycation. Damaging skin from the inside out, this happens when sugar molecules attach to collagen fibres and begin a series of chemical reactions which glue those collagen fibres to each other. The net effect is a stiffer, less flexible framework for skin to rest on, and you’ll know you’ve got it if skin looks crepey, dry and has a soft, sagging texture. It’s real, it’s a thing, and because of our huge over-consumption of sugar – The World Health Organisation has recently revised daily recommendations down to just six teaspoons daily – it’s happening to much younger women.

Sugar-coated

“I’m seeing women of 25 with skin that looks dry and crepey, with fine degenerative lines,” reveals

skin expert Nuala Woulfe, of Nuala Woulfe Skincare Clinic (www.nualawoulfe.ie). “It’s because our diets are so high in sugar,” she insists.

Okay, so it’s not like glycation as a physical process is anything new, but because of the excess of sugar we consume, updated skincare research and development is now being carried out to see what can be done about the issue.

Sour note

Here’s the bad news: once bonds are glued and that foundation’s fixed, damage is hard to remedy. But what you can do is change a few things, such as what you’re eating, your general lifestyle approach and also look to topical skincare products.

However, fixing the problem for our skin isn’t quite as simple as just cutting out sweet treats. So much of the sugar we consume is hidden in drinks and convenience foods, and that means we sometimes don’t realise we’re eating it.

Lifestyle factors can contribute too. “Because our diets are so high in sugar, stress is also affecting blood sugar levels,” adds Nuala. “Skipping meals doesn’t help either. It all goes back to balancing blood sugars,” she states.

Sticky situations

Elaine O’Gorman, nutritionist for Slim with Tina (slimwithtina.com), agrees. “As humans, we’ve no requirement for added sugar,” she points out. “It’s an unnecessary source of extra calories and doesn’t make us feel full – if anything it leaves you wanting more.”

Health issues associated with over-consumption include tooth decay, weight gain, hyperactivity, headaches and insomnia, plus insulin resistance, and the biggest problem for most people are those tricky hidden sugars, lurking away in things like pre-packaged foods. “Our intake of ‘invisible sugar’ is rising all the time,” confirms Elaine.

It’s scary stuff, but there is a solution. Try to cut out added sugars and stick with those that are naturally occurring. “These are found in fruit, vegetables and dairy products,” says Elaine, who explains why you’ll be better off.

“They also provide nutrients, fibre, vitamins and minerals, whereas added sugars are purely empty calories.”

Nuala advises striking a balance. “It’s all about everything

“OVERLOADING ON SWEET TREATS IS ACTUALLY ONE OF THE MOST AGEING THINGS YOU CAN DO TO YOUR SKIN.”



in moderation,” she says. “Fats are quite good for us; our liver and brains need them and the body knows what to do with fat,” she points out. “But with man-made sugars like fructose, the body doesn’t know what to do with them at all.”

It all might sound like a bitter pill to swallow, but reduce your intake of sugar now, and long-term, you can bet on life being sweeter and your skin looking smoother. **S**

SWEET SWAPS

Elaine O’Gorman’s tips for a tasty transformation to a sugar-free regime.

- **Avoid low-fat.** When fat is removed something else gets added back in to make it taste good, and usually it’s sugar.
- **Experiment** with natural sweeteners like Stevia and Xylitol in your cooking. Banana and apple purees can also sweeten foods while coconut sugar is great for baking.
- **Instead of using sugar** in tea and coffee, try adding cinnamon. It can assist with sugar cravings and also helps stabilise blood sugar levels.
- **Ditch fizzy drinks** and switch to water, or water with a little unsweetened fruit juice added.
- **Eat the whole fruit** as opposed to fruit juices.
- **Cut out** processed and ready-made meals, which are often super-high in sugars and additives. With any food, think closer to the farm than the factory.

Picture courtesy of Passionata