



## Back-to-School

# Sugar Detox

How to **Plan Lunches**  
to Strengthen Immunity,  
Mood, and Wellness

→ As we head into the back-to-school season, families are faced with more choices surrounding their children's nutrition: Do they opt for packed lunches each day or try the in-school food selections? Which options will help them sustain energy for the rest of the day? What's the best brain food?

BY DONI WILSON, ND

One challenge to consider is the importance of trying to reduce (or eliminate) sugar to boost immunity, mood, and wellness—and to aid in overall performance in school. But before we dive into my five back-to-school sugar detox tips, let's explore what sugar is and why it's worth cutting back.

### Demystifying Sugar

When eaten in large quantities, sugar (the white granular or powdered stuff that we put in coffee, baked goods, and many packaged foods and beverages) triggers an ever-increasing insulin response by the body—in both adults and children. At some point, your cells will stop responding to the high levels of insulin (this is known as insulin resistance) and your pancreas may even stop making so much insulin (resulting in diabetes). When sugar is not able to get into your cells, it either turns into body fat, leading to weight gain, and/or attaches to tissues in the body causing damage to the eyes, kidneys, blood vessels, and more. In addition, high levels of sugar are a stress on the liver because excess fat is stored there, too.

These health effects are particularly harmful in children's growing bodies. High sugar intake can lead to weight gain, mood changes, decreased focus, susceptibility to colds and other infections, and risk of diabetes at an earlier age.

### The Sugar Detox

To experience the benefit of a sugar detox to the fullest, I recommend avoiding sugar altogether. If 100 percent avoidance is not possible—which is the case for most kids—then I recommend you do your best to reduce your family's sugar intake as much as possible. For some kids, the best approach is to limit them to one "sugary" item per day instead of a sweet at every meal and during snack time. Not sure where to start? Let the following five tips be your guide.

# 1

## Understand Where Sugar is Hiding

The first step is to fully understand where sugar is hiding. For example, when you look at the nutrition facts on a product label you will see “carbohydrates” as well as “fiber” and “sugar.” Carbohydrates are in starchy vegetables, grains, fruits, nuts, and seeds. Although carbohydrates are broken down via digestion into sugar molecules (glucose and fructose), you don’t need to avoid them completely during a sugar detox—however, it is helpful to keep carbohydrates to a minimum and in balance with protein. Aim for no more than 15 grams of carbohydrates each time you eat, and remember to balance out the carbs with a similar amount of protein (7 to 15 grams), plus healthy fats.

“Sugar” on the label indicates actual sugar, and that’s what you should try to avoid or decrease during the sugar detox. If you see that there are grams of sugar in the product, then look at the ingredients list to find out where that sugar is coming from. It could be actual sugar, or it could be sugar disguised in another form—so look for not only “sugar” on your food packaging, but also the following:

Beet sugar	Raw cane sugar
Brown sugar	Glucose
Brown rice syrup	Maltose
Cane sugar	Malt sugar
Cane juice	Sucrose
Dextrose	Evaporated cane juice
Dried cane sugar	

Fructose, which is in fruit and vegetables as well as agave, honey, and maple syrup, can be a problem too, especially when highly concentrated, such as in high fructose corn syrup. It doesn’t trigger insulin, but is instead a direct issue for your digestion, liver, and metabolism when consumed in large quantities. Watch out for fructose in these forms:

Agave
Corn syrup
High fructose corn syrup (HFCS)
Honey
Maple syrup
Molasses

# 2

## Watch Out for Sugar-Filled Beverages

Many beverages can contain sugar—even those marketed as “healthy”—so it is wise to watch what you sip! Soda, juices, and electrolyte or “vitamin” drinks

often contain sugar and/or high fructose corn syrup. The result?

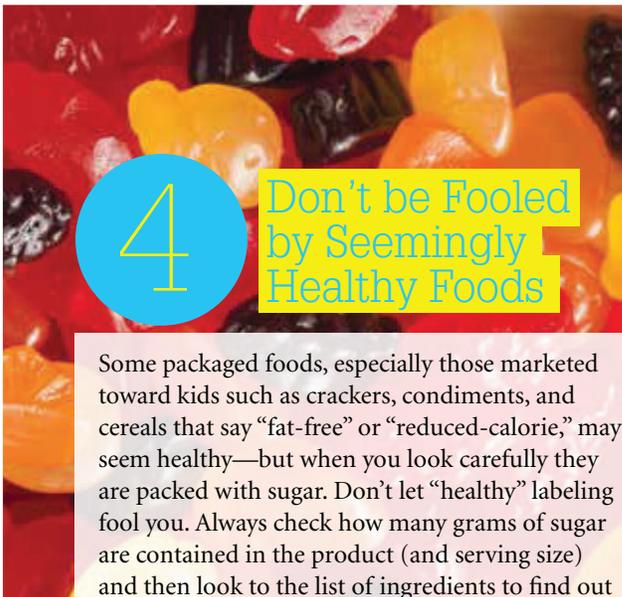
A spike in blood sugar levels followed by a rebound of low blood sugar. In the long term, this leads to weight gain, mood changes, and decreased focus. It’s better to avoid these sugar-filled beverages altogether for ultimate health. Instead, kids can drink water, seltzer water, water flavored with a hint of fruit, or drinks sweetened with stevia.



## Outsmart Sugar Addiction

As you may already know, sugar is addictive. Soon after you and your children eat it, your body releases “feel good hormones” such as the neurotransmitter dopamine, and at first it seems to make you feel better. Then, as your blood sugar level rises, you may experience an increase in energy, focus, and mood—but not for long. As insulin moves glucose out of your blood and into your cells, and subsequently your blood sugar levels fall, you are more likely to feel down, less energized, and irritable. At that point, it’s likely that all you can think about is eating sugar again so you can return to the previous state of a sugar high.

Therefore, it is not uncommon to have intense cravings for sugar at the outset of a sugar detox. Rest assured that over time, and once you avoid (or reduce) sugar long enough, your cravings will subside.



# 4

### Don't be Fooled by Seemingly Healthy Foods

Some packaged foods, especially those marketed toward kids such as crackers, condiments, and cereals that say “fat-free” or “reduced-calorie,” may seem healthy—but when you look carefully they are packed with sugar. Don’t let “healthy” labeling fool you. Always check how many grams of sugar are contained in the product (and serving size) and then look to the list of ingredients to find out the source of that sugar.

Instead of processed sugar, choose small amounts of healthier sweeteners that don’t cause such a strong insulin response. Coconut sugar, palm sugar, raw honey, and stevia—an herb that is sweet but doesn’t trigger insulin at all—are all good examples.



# 5

### Replace Sugar-Filled Foods With Whole Foods

Head to your local health food store and replace the sugar-filled products in your home with those that are free of sugar. Look for whole, unprocessed foods to add to your cupboards, like whole fruits, vegetables, meat/fish/poultry, and whole grains such as brown rice, quinoa, and millet. Foods that are higher in fiber are also great options because fiber slows down the digestion and absorption of carbs, delaying the insulin response.

→ **Kid-Friendly Bonus Tip:** If you package and present healthy items in a fun way so that your kids will enjoy them, the transition from sugar-filled foods to whole foods will be a lot smoother. <sup>ns</sup>

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