

Is fructose to blame for obesity? Not completely

BY BARBARA QUINN
MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE

I'm confused. Is high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) — a common food sweetener — really to blame for our exploding obesity epidemic? Or has it been unfairly singled out as an innocent bystander? This is what I learned:

What is it? High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is a sweetener made from corn that contains fructose and glucose — the same ingredients that make sucrose, the sugar we call ... "sugar."

Although it is called "high fructose" corn syrup, most formulations of HFCS are similar to sucrose, which is a 50/50 mixture of fructose and glucose. One formulation of HFCS is 42 percent fructose and 58 percent glucose; another is 55

percent fructose and 45 percent glucose.

Naturally-occurring sugar

Fructose is a sugar that occurs naturally in fruit (hence its name), some vegetables and honey. A cup of apple juice contains about 15 grams of fructose. A cup of soda sweetened with HFCS contains about 13 grams of fructose

Fructose is metabolized differently from other sugars. It has a lower glycemic index so it causes a lower rise in blood sugars for people with diabetes. Small amounts of fructose help the liver synthesize glycogen — the storage form of glucose that helps marathoners keep going and going.

Fructose is the main component of "fructans" — health-promoting

substances in fruits and vegetables that feed the good bacteria in the gut. Fructooligosaccharides (FOS) and inulin are fructans that improve digestion.

Too much fructose, however, disturbs the body's ability to control blood sugars. Some studies have shown that high amounts of fructose may contribute to insulin resistance ... a precursor to diabetes. Excess fructose can also cause the liver to produce more fat particles.

Fructose may not help control appetite as well as glucose. Glucose provides fuel to the brain. In the process, it sends a signal that says, "I'm here. You can stop feeling hungry now." In contrast, fructose has limited entry into the brain so it doesn't send "I'm satisfied"

signals. This may help explain how we can pump 800 calories from a 64-oz. soda into our body and our brain still says, "What's for dinner?"

Others reasons exist

So, is high fructose corn syrup to blame for our worldwide epidemic of obesity and diabetes? It's probably not that simple, most researchers say. It doesn't explain why Europe — where HFCS is virtually nonexistent — has also had an explosion of obesity.

Truth is, we are eating more sugar, more fruit juice and more foods sweetened with high fructose corn syrup. But cause and effect is difficult to prove.

A recent review on this topic suggests "other dietary factors"

may also be involved in our national weight ballooning. For example, one study on overweight kids found they did indeed consume more sugar-sweetened drinks (including fruit juice) than kids who were not overweight. However, the overweight kids also ate more meat, grains and potato chips than the other kids.

Another study found that drinking sodas frequently was significantly linked to being overweight. But so was ordering super-sized portions, eating while watching TV and not getting enough exercise.

Bottom line: Foods that contain high fructose corn syrup can make you fat. And so can Cheetos and Ding-Dongs. As more studies clarify the confusion, I think I'll have fewer Big Gulps.

Writing a memoir can heal the soul, bring clarity and healing

It took 10 years for therapist and writer Linda Joy Myers, MFT, to complete her memoir. Apart from seeking out her family's individual stories and recounting her own memories, she also researched the era by going through Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalogs. Writing her story enabled her to see behind people's lives, better understand motivations, and heal from a childhood in which she was abandoned by her mother.

She teaches others to put to rest, as she calls it, memories that pre-



L.J. ANDERSON

vent people from living a full life. And, one of the best ways to do that, she believes, is to write one's memoir.

Myers leads memoir-writing workshops and is the author of "Becoming Whole: Writing Your Healing Story" and her own memoir, "Don't Call Me Mother." Her Web site is: www.lindajoy

myers.com.

Q: What did writing your own memoir do for you?

A: Writing my memoir was a deeply healing experience for me.

One reason we write and read stories is to understand how others coped and survived, and also to examine our own paths of growth and healing.

Getting the story out of my memory and onto the page clarified the feelings I had about my mother who had abandoned me when I was five. It eventually enabled me to let go of some of the pain and to forgive her. I wrote my story not only to explore being a little girl without her mother, but as a thank-you note

to family and friends who had loved me and given me support as I grew up.

One reason we write and read stories is to understand how others coped and survived, and also to examine our own paths of growth and healing. I talk with my students about capturing the "dark" and the

"light" moments of our lives, and weaving these into the tapestry that becomes a memoir.

In my book, "Becoming Whole: Writing Your Healing Story," I talk about the power of witnessing, a psychological concept discussed by Alice Miller in her books about abuse recovery. When we write our story, we become our own witness and come to see ourselves and our life journey through a new lens. Witnessing myself as a little girl missing my mother and seeing that I was more than my experience of abandonment and abuse, I realized how strong I was — a survivor with the determination to change

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