



Health Fact Sheet

Stimulants

All stimulants affect blood sugar levels. Many people use tea, coffee, alcohol and cigarettes to counteract low blood sugar levels instead of sweet foods and snacks. The effect, health-wise, however is the same.

Caffeine produces adrenalin, which releases glucose into the bloodstream for energy for the 'fight or flight' reaction. However, in today's world this reaction very rarely occurs and the glucose isn't used for an energy surge. The body therefore has to release insulin into the blood stream to take out the excess glucose as this can be damaging if left in the bloodstream. This then leads to a drop in blood sugar levels which in turn leads to a feeling of tiredness or lethargy followed by the craving for sweet foods or another cup of coffee to boost energy levels and so it goes on.

In the long term this yo-yo effect leads to increasing insulin resistance (effectively more and more insulin being required to do the same job) with the possibility of health problems such as diabetes. In the short term it leads to weight gain as the excess glucose is returned to the liver for storage and, when this is full, it is converted into fat and stored around the body.

What Are Stimulants?

Caffeine is the prime ingredient as well as cigarettes, therefore this takes in tea, coffee, chocolate, cola drinks and energy drinks.

Coffee

Coffee has three stimulants in it, the strongest of which is caffeine, so even decaffeinated coffee has a stimulant effect and can affect sleep patterns.

Alternatives: dandelion coffee, herbal teas, teecino, caro extra or bambu.

Tea

A cup of strong tea contains as much caffeine as a cup of coffee. The tannin in tea also interferes with the absorption of some of the vital minerals so there is a high possibility if you drink a lot of tea that you are deficient in these. Earl Grey is particularly addictive, due to the bergamot it contains.

Alternatives: rooibosch tea, herbal and fruit teas.

Chocolate

The active ingredient in cocoa provides a significant quantity of one of the stimulants found in coffee. There is also small amounts of caffeine in chocolate and quantities of sugar. These very quickly lead to a craving for more and more chocolate.

Alternatives: fruit, sugar-free sweets

Colas and Energy Drinks

Can contain high amounts of caffeine and often high levels of sugar also. Added to this, many have artificial additives and colouring, increasing the stimulatory effects.

Cigarettes

These stimulate the central nervous system and raise blood sugar levels. It also depletes the body of various nutrients, leading to type B malnutrition, and contributes to a variety of life-threatening diseases such as cancer and heart disease. It is also very ageing – so why do it! Quitting can be made easier by first stabilizing blood sugar levels – and this also helps with weight gain issues.

Alcohol

High in calories and potentially addictive alcohol can suppress the appetite but lead to cravings for more alcohol, so you consume high calories with no nutrient value. It also affects the body's ability to absorb many essential nutrients. The sugars in alcohol are rapidly absorbed and turned to fat by the action of insulin. Habitual drinking can lead to liver damage which further inhibits the body's ability to control blood sugar successfully and lead to more weight issues.

Stress

This has the same effect as caffeine. The body releases adrenalin and cortisol into the blood stream. The subsequent flood of glucose stimulates the release of insulin. The longer you remain stressed the more insulin resistant you become, leading in the long term to weight gain as well as other detrimental health effects. Balancing your blood sugar can have a beneficial effect on your ability to cope with stressful situations.

What Can I Do To Help?

The common factor you will have seen in all the above is that they all affect the body's blood sugar levels adversely. Therefore, in order to successfully wean yourself off your stimulant(s) of choice you need to maintain a programme to address this issue. See the fact sheet on Blood Sugar for further information.