Sugaru2019s Evolutionary Role and Why It Matters

For one, the kids have a built-in preference for sugar and for sweetness. And it's supposed to be a protective mechanism that would favor consuming breast milk, which was sweet, and avoid food that had spoiled before we had the modern conveniences that we do now.

So this was an evolutionary advantage which is backfiring in today's high-sugar food environment. This is Dr. Talks. All right. Thank you guys so much for joining us here at the Raising Healthier Kids Summit.

I'm really excited to talk to my colleague, Dr. Michael Goran, who I always love talking to. He's the Director of Nutrition and Obesity Program at Saban Research at USC and also the author of an amazing book that I absolutely love called Sugar Proof.

Great to be here. Thanks for having me on and congratulations to you on everything that's happening. Your new book, your new baby, exciting times. Thank you so much.

So I think sugar is a really interesting topic to talk about because it's in basically all of our food, but I'm curious as to why you took this up as a cause, why do you thought that, you know, sugar, is such an important topic that you want to write a book on it.

I mean, obviously you're involved in diet and nutrition and obesity, led you to write a book called Sugar Proof and talk about that. Yeah, it really stands from the studies, the findings that we had from research that you've been doing for many years.

the realization that sugar plays such an important role in derailing childhood health and development from many different perspectives. And honestly, kind of a little bit of frustration because we do the research, it takes years, we write the papers.

Very few people actually read the paper, but I realized there was a lot of practical information in there that goes beyond the research, so I really wanted to translate the findings from research papers that nobody really reads to parents like you and me and other people listening that could really use that information and practical ways.

Do you think that sugar is a topic which we should be talking a lot more about in terms of our health complications these days in American around the world?

I mean, we're having a, you know, obesity epidemic, a diabetes epidemic. Things are certainly going in the wrong direction and there are many things that could be blamed for that.

And certainly there's more than one reason. But I personally think the sugar, is the biggest reason or maybe one of the bigger reasons, but I'm curious, do you feel like it hasn't been discussed.

I feel like in the past it was more like fats and saturated fats, and things like that, that we were super worried about, but not as much about sugar.

Do you feel that's a mistake that you made and we should be focusing a little more on sugar? Yeah, I think so. It's not the only factor. Look, it's multifactorial.

There's lots of contextual factors, But sugar is a common factor, one that can be addressed and one we can modify. But it hasn't been talked about. You know, it's easy to vilify fat.

It's the easy-to-vilify some other aspects of the diet, but vilifying sugar is tough because there's a lot of aspects, of a

diet that relate to sugar that we enjoy.

And that are part of our culture and part celebration. So I think we haven't found the happy medium yet. We can't eradicate sugar, or we have to find a happy minimum.

We can still enjoy food and enjoy all the good things that go along with it, but we're kind of overdoing it now. And it's just everywhere, like you said at the beginning, which processed foods really 70% of processed goods contain some types of sugar and liquid sugar is a big problem and drinking sugar, So I think if we scale back on these types of things, I'd think we can find a healthy medium.

I don't believe in eradication of sugar. Which would be hard to do since it's in a lot of foods naturally.

Why Sugar Proof Was Written

Anyways, but that was what I was curious when I wanted to ask you about next is, kind of delineating for parents natural sugar and like an apple or a fruit versus processed sugar.

And are you as concerned about something in a berry as you are about a processed food? Are those two things even the same? No, they're not. I mean, I like to think of it as the good, the bad, and the ugly.

So, sugars and fruits, perfectly good. Fruit should be part of a healthy diet. Just don't eat a lot of it all at once, which very few people would actually be doing.

There's no problem with the natural sugars in food. It's when we liberate the sugars from the fruit into juice, for example, and drink it, in which case we've concentrated it and removed many of the healthy aspects.

So by sugars really and sugar proof, we're really focused on the added sugars. Sugars are added to food during processing, baking, cooking, preserving.

That's the bad sugars that we're mainly focused on. And really the ugly, which is another whole topic in of itself, is the sweeteners. The alternative to sugars are what we can talk about later.

So sugars have different perspectives, different effects on the body and should be handled very differently. Yeah, and I mean, you mentioned there just very briefly about the sweeteners, but I also get the questions a lot.

I'm sure you get all the time about like, what sugar should you use? I means, because people are still going to want to sweetened up their food. And at least for me, generally what I try to encourage people to do is to use real ingredients for their sugars, like honey or maple syrup or dates, things like that.

You could still get too much if you eat a ton of it, But in general, I feel like a a healthier and safer if your using something that comes from a natural source than a process source like high fructose corn syrup or something along those lines.

And similarly with a sweetener, they might say that it's better, but then five years from now, we're going to realize that its worse if we don't already realize it is worse now.

Probably anything processed is not, for the most part, going be that good for you. But what are your thoughts on that? Absolutely. Yeah, you know, I think there's a hierarchy that certainly in my kitchen and my baking and cooking, use raw honey, maple syrup, even coconut sugar, brown sugar.

Just try to use less of it. So that's… definitely fine. The, you know, ideally using whole foods to sweeten, so all of the recipes in sugar-proof use the natural sweetness of things like bananas or dates or even any dried fruit that provides sweetness and flavor.

Those are fine and I think here, the evidence that we do know about the sweetener's, even the naturally ones like

stevia and monk fruit, which are advertised as natural, they're They come from a natural source as does sugar itself, which is purified from sugarcane.

Monkfruit sweetener is a compound, is the chemical purifying from monkfruit and the same for stevia. It's an active chemical, roboidosoid A, that's purify and processed out of the stevally.

So whichever way you look at it, we're talking about additives. chemicals being added to the diet that may or may not have problems. The evidence so far on balance I would say is not great and you're always better off with sweetening with a natural whole food source or raw source itself.

I think it's getting even more complicated for parents, whether you're professional or not professional, because the words keep changing and there's just so many words that these companies are using to sound healthier, but it is not necessarily healthier.

Like you say, the word natural. So there are natural flavors and artificial flavors, and natural sweeteners. And I would say yeah, probably if it was from a natural source, it would probably be better than an artificial source in terms of being in a lab.

But it still probably kind of came from the lab, just from natural source versus from, you know, some chemistry test tube. But I don't know. Probably at the end of the day, all of these things are not great for you.

And what is great, what's better for us is a real food, right?

Natural Sugar vs Added Sugar

And, and, it's probably not the End of The World if you have a sweetener every now and again, but if your using it every single day. We're probably going to come to realize over time that all these are very bad for them.

I think we're already there. You know I just don' think it is mainstream information yet because the companies I thing hold the power over what they, put out there, and they're not going to change unless we force them to.

Right. Companies, I mean, companies are using that tactic to say, yeah, we're cutting back on sugar. Our overall sugar content is reduced, but really all they are doing is replacing it with sweetener.

So that allows them, to, say they were producing products with less sugar, so it's food companies and influencers who are pushing a lot of misinformation on the public.

I, mean the reality is we, We don't have great actual data on the effects of these individual compounds or products, but the information we do know to me does not paint a glorious picture, not to mention the fact that they just don' t taste good.

So it can alter the taste and I think we've drifting away slowly from the natural goodness and the actual flavors of, as you say, real food. Yeah, I think it's sad that we are slowly drifting from real foods more and more towards artificial food and There's some plus, I get it.

I mean, there's a lot of people on the, in the earth and they want to make sure that everybody has food. So like there are some positives to it, you don't want people to go hungry.

But at the same time, i think that we're making a mistake in terms of pushing us towards companies and corporations and producing food in a mass produced way versus figuring out ways that can produce more food locally and naturally.

And it doesn't mean you can't have any of the other food too, but we are not, localizing food production, having more home gardens, have more gardens involved with stores.

Certain individuals do it, certain groups do and they kind of push it. It's not a mainstream kind thing, which is possible. You could have a garden on every street.

Playgrounds have gardens in them. You could have grocery stores growing some stuff on their roofs. Like these are all things that we could do if we wanted to, and then we can kind of have a mixture of some of the artificial stuff and more of natural stuff.

But it doesn't, we're not doing that yet. I hope one day that is going to change, but it's not going come from the corporation. It's going have to come people.

And people like you who get enough research out there, we can get 3,000 of you doing research on the same topic and banging over people's heads like, look, this is not good, our health is terrible, let's do this other thing.

We could do it, it's not like people can't make gardens, they just have to prioritize it. Yeah. It's all doable if we got the priorities straightened out, but there's a lot of complicated food policies and issues and food lobbying like you mentioned earlier that are kind of more powerful voices but I think it comes back to grassroots movements and that's what we're trying to do with Sugar Proof is just try to get out there, talk to parents, work with people like yourself to give the word out through your channels and A lot of times, unfortunately, we're kind of preaching to the choir, which can be a little frustrating, I think, you know, because there's a huge disparity in some of these things also that we shouldn't forget about in terms of underserved communities, impoverished communities who have even poorer access to healthy food and greater economic burdens, who are more susceptible to impact of poor nutrition on their health.

Yeah, no, I couldn't agree more. I want to transition a little bit into the why of the problem with sugar and maybe get down a bit more to the individual level for parents who are watching this.

Sweeteners, Labels, and Food Marketing

And I kind of wanted to start by asking you about the health consequences of eating too much sugar. So basically what I'm wanting to discuss a little bit more is, you know, parents I think for the most part haven't understand that sugar is not that good for you, but I am not sure they understand why.

If they are eating a bunch of sugar, what's that doing to them? How is that affecting them long term? And I know that this is very much within the realm of what you talk about and what do you do.

I was wondering if you could elaborate on that a bit and the kind of why? What's the problem with sugar? Yeah, and for kids, especially, there's additional effects because, for one, the kids have a built-in preference for sugar and sweetness and it's supposed to be a protective mechanism that would favor consuming breast milk, which was sweet, and avoid food that had spoiled before we had the modern conveniences that we do now.

This was an evolutionary advantage which is backfiring in today's high sugar food environment where food companies, you could argue, are thriving or taking advantage of that preference by making food sweeter.

And getting kids to like them more and getting them hooked on it and the whole market of formula and transition milks and early foods, which are very sweet products, would be a good example of that.

So first of all, we have sugars everywhere. Kids have a built-in preference. Third, is, in terms of why, is that it turns out that kids are more susceptible to some of the harmful effects of sugars.

More susceptible than you and I and all the other parents. And that's because of their unique physiology, that their bodies are building, their organs are developing, and because They are more susceptible.

And this, to me, was a huge revelation, wake-up call during the writing of the pope that became stronger. Let me give you a very clear-cut example of that, that is much more tangible and visceral.

That's tooth decay. I know sugars cause teeth to rot, and this is quite prevalent in kids now. Why are kids more susceptible to tooth decay? And that's because their teeth are still developing and they don't have the enamel yet to protect the teeth from the acid produced by the bacteria in the mouth that are feeding on the sugar.

So that is just a clear-cut example, but you can also think of other examples where the body, the organs are revolving and that natural development of those organs can be derailed by excess sugar, I feel like it's very interesting as a parent to watch your child.

Especially, you know, we're a pretty health conscious family. We don't use a lot of sugar in anything that we cook at home, certainly not artificial sugar.

And then you watch your child eat some artificial sugars at whatever, a party or something like that. It's amazing to me to watch how much of a difference there is in such a short time in his behavior.

I think that, I just don' t realize how it affects us because most people are just eating it constantly, so that's just their baseline. Or they don t really pay attention to those things.

But as a physician who's Interested in integrated medicine is certainly really focused on something like sugar, which is one of the most important topics, I think.

It's just so mind-boggling to watch it in your own child and to see the difference. And then it really makes me wonder how much of behavioral issues that we see with kids or the focus issues with are nothing more than the food that we're eating or certainly not contribute in a significant way from the foods that were eating.

And people don't even realize it and they think they're eat healthy, but they are getting something that's processed with a lot of sugar and those kids are maybe highly sensitive to that sugar.

But it's just, they always eating that every day. So it is, you know, I'm curious what you found out, because that is what I just see at home and I think it was really interesting.

Yeah. I mean, I think that we see that a lot and again, that's in sugar proof. We wanted to come up with strategies to try and curtail that issue and to reverse or treat that.

And again it's to do with it as preference because the ones can start eating sugar, they want more because there is that built in preference and there was that addictive element.

to sugar and sweet food. So you get into a cycle of more sugar begets more sugars. Some of our strategies are just simple tricks to try and scale that back and reverse it in a way.

And if we want to finish up in a few minutes, but I guess, what are some of the big takeaways that you would want parents to know over the years of research that she's done when it comes to sugar writing this book?

What are the things that surprised you? And what were some other big take aways that.

How Sugar Affects Kidsu2019 Health and Behavior

Would want to leave them with when it comes to sugar and I will also remind so you know for sure I think we shouldn't add any artificial sugar to any of the food you make at home almost ever I mean the things that you mentioned like, you Know coconut sugar dates that kind of stuff I Think that's fine.

But to me, I didn't even think about this when I was growing up. I certainly didn' t think About it 10 years ago, but now I'm very conscious that we never, we don't even buy it.

It's not in our home. So I am curious what takeaways you have gotten after diving so deeply into this topic and how you handle that with your own family.

Yeah, it's, I think, you know, there's a couple of different things. So, yeah, a little bit of sugar is fine. I mean, just an example, i made salad dressing last night at home.

Yeah. i put a teaspoon of brown sugar in there, but you, know that's much better than buying a salad, dressing and we use that over salad and might eat a lot of the salad out of it.

It's an, example of how it can be. Okay, I think we've got to kind of focus more on the bigger ticket items like liquid sugar. So we don't bring liquid, sugar into the house and I urge parents not to and talking about sodas, juices and such like kids will have plenty of opportunities outside the home but you have to create a, the whole environment is one that you do have control over and liquid sugar should not be a part of that.

And, you know, that's pretty new information as a realization that when sugar is consumed in liquid format, it's very concentrated and it is metabolized very differently and tends to be much more harmful to the body, especially the wing bodies.

And I mean, generically, it's a pretty new thing. We have data to show that kids weren't drinking, kids used to drink water and milk for their source of hydration and now it is juice and soda and energy drinks and all the rest of it.

So this is a generational shift and I think we need to take a hard look at that. But as a parent, you can resolve that pretty easily. Definitely. And one last question, something very tangible.

So for a parent who's going to the store, buying a product and, you know, they've listened and they're like, okay, I'm going start reading labels, i'm gonna look at the labels.

I am going try to, be more mindful of what i am purchasing. What is your advice for what they should look for on that label? What ingredients should they avoid?

How much sugar is too much? When you're reading a label, what do you do when you are choosing a products and what are you avoiding? Yeah, it's a great question.

And I've made some mistakes before. I mean, you know, I have come home from the store with a product and taken a closer look at it and realized that it wasn't as good as it was made out to be.

Uh, and that happens. But what I'm looking for are, okay, in the front of the food label, the main food labels, we have the calories and the fats and sugars.

We now have a line for added sugars, So I'm looking for added sugars. Let's say you're buying a yogurt, for example. There's natural sugars in yogurt from the dairy, from lactose, which is perfectly fine.

But if there's any sugar added to it, it will show up now separately as added sugar. So that's one thing I am looking. And these added sugars can add up.

So look for products like yogurts, ketchups, bars, crackers, breads. Look for product without added sugar. And then, but the story doesn't end there, unfortunately, because it's a bit more complicated than that.

Because you have to look at the ingredient list, which can be like super complicated. And if ingredient lists is giving you a headache to looks at, it is probably not good.

But because these sweeteners that we talked about, those wouldn't show up on the front of the package label. You have look for those on ingredient. list.

and basically we're looking for things that just don't look right or complicated words, or at least as a first pass. So it's a little bit of a detective job to kind of navigate through that.

But generally, if you stick with organic products where you can, you're pretty safe and stick But something can say

to no added sugars and kind of, you know, advertisers no add sugars, but then you get home, look at the ingredients list and it's got monk fruit sweetener or Stevia sweeteners, something like that in there.

And I think you should avoid those only for more natural products.

Practical Tips for Cutting Back on Sugar

Yeah, no, I couldn't agree more. And I think that just like you said, you're one of the foremost researchers in this field and it's still complicated for you.

So, for me, it is like, yeah, literally need to get a detective glass, magnifying glass out and be a Detective. As smart as anybody is, they keep changing the game.

year. It's like there are new words and different regulations. And I think that it's good that we're at least more mindful of these things with something like you said, like, you know, they're writing out added sugar now.

So, there's some motion to try to make sure that they are transparent, but it is really hard and they have multi-billion dollar groups of people figuring out how they can get in products that are cheaper to making more money.

That's their job and our job is just to figure out what is healthy for our own families. And the advice you gave is what I tell people basically exactly.

If the words are on there that you don't know, it's probably not good for you. So maybe choose a different product, but at least look for those things.

Look at the added sugar. because at the end of the day, we all get way too much sugar. Nobody that lives in the modern society needs any more sugar, so any place that you can minimize it, anyplace that can make your own food, just like you said, you put in a little scoop of sugar and that's fine, it's not going to be a big deal and you know exactly what's in there and it is not 30 scoops.

It's just a bit, and we just don't realize, when you talk about like yogurt, all these things, People go on a TV show and they're like, oh my gosh, look how much sugar is in this yogurt.

It's like a pile this big or in one drink. We don't realize what's in there and we must realize, what we're giving our kids. I think you guys have great advice and what I try to do also is just keep it simple.

So here's another example. Yogurt. I found a good yogurt. It's an Icelandic yogurt, very high in protein, 19 grams of protein per serving. Sometimes I like a little flavor in there.

So what did I do this morning? I took a half teaspoon of apricot jam, which I have around, and I just mixed it into the yogurt You could do the same with mashing a banana or a bit of honey.

Keep it simple. You know, when food companies make a flavorful yogurt, it's got not just the sugar in there, but lots of other preservatives and compounds.

You don't have to start from scratch, you can start with a base product like plain yogurt and you could add your own floating rings to it and kind of make that even a bit more personalized and a little bit fun as well.

That's just such great advice to finish on because people think they have to do everything, and you don't. Every little bit that you do helps. Even if the yogurt that your have is not the best yogurt, but it's a better version, you just put it in yourself.

the sugar thing you put in there is not the best, but it's a million times better than what you would have bought, which it all adds up. Every little change helps because we can have some sugar, for sure we, can and we eat some of these products.

It's just that it is very obvious that we're eating too much of this stuff and it now creating a health epidemic. And so we need to come backwards a little, we don't have to stop eating any of the food.

We just can't continue to eat as much as we are in the portions that were eating it on the consistency that are eating. So we kind of Peter back a little bit and not to say you have to eat broccoli every day for everything.

That's not true. We just can't have a cup full of sugar seven times a day. There's a point where it's just too much for our body and we're getting there now.

So can you tell people a little bit more about where to find you and just remind people about your book again? And I'm a huge fan of that book and that's why I always love chatting with you.

I think it's extremely informative, one of the most on the topic of sugar. So if you're interested, I want you to check that out. Thank you. Yeah, the book is Sugarproof, which is available in all formats, wherever books are sold.

And our website, sugarproofkids.com, we have more recipes and tips on the website. Then on Instagram, you can follow us at sugar proofkids, so we're constantly putting out new information to try and get information out there and try to get parents to, as you said, gradually make small changes.

I think it could be overwhelming, but every small step you can do will have an impact. Yeah. And for the parents who are watching this that like research and data, you know, You're not in it for influencing.

You are in for information and you're coming from a highly scientific, highly educated background. So for individuals that really like that style, then there's nobody better that I know than you when it comes to talking about this topic.

I appreciate you being here and spreading the message. Yeah, I hope you can clone yourself like 50 times and maybe we'll get somewhere. Doing the best I can.

All right. Well, thank you for being there. Thanks for all you're doing as well. Getting the word out. Appreciate it. Very helpful. Thank you. Thank you for tuning in to Doctor Talks.

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