

The White Powder

Ayurvedic Strategies for Sugar Addiction

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Addiction to sugar is a significant cause of overweight, obesity, diabetes, dental caries, candidiasis and adrenal deficiency. In addition, by lowering immunity, white sugar may contribute to the incidence of cancer and acute and chronic infections. Although white sugar as an addiction of choice affects all ages from infancy on, individuals born in the 1950s are particularly susceptible, due to the prevalence of sweetened infant formula at that period. All types of *agni* may be involved in sugar cravings, but the nature, consequences and management of sugar addiction differs depending upon the *agni* type.

***Visham Agni* and Sugar**

The individual with *visham agni* has cravings for sweet, salty, sour, spicy and oily foods. They are just as likely to indulge in tortilla chips and salsa, potato chips, French fries and ketchup, salted peanuts or crackers as in sugar. To complicate matters, manufacturers frequently include sugar in savory items such as crackers, chips or peanut butter. Often, such individuals may realize that sweet baked goods such as cookies upset their digestion. Instead, they will use M&Ms or chocolate peanuts, seeking the combination of sweet, fat and crunch.

The impact of white sugar on such an individual can be devastating to the adrenals. *Vata*-provoked clients with *visham agni* are prone to under-eating and random meal plans. Breakfast could be a few Twinkies or a Power Bar in the car on the way to work. Feeling hungry while at work, they may snack on chips, crackers, doughnuts or whatever is in the office or the vending machine. After a salad for lunch, they are hungry again by mid afternoon and begin consuming chocolate and other munchies. By dinner time, they have no appetite left, having wasted their available *agni* on junk foods. Each time sugar is eaten, it stimulates an adrenal-type energy rush, gradually leading to adrenal exhaustion, especially if combined with caffeine. As the adrenals become increasingly exhausted, the urge to eat sugar grows stronger, in response to the need to “get some energy”. As much as sugar may be a cause of overweight in other *agni* types, it can contribute to chronic underweight in the person with *visham agni*. Yet despite being underweight, the junk-food junkie may have more toxic hard fat in the system than the *pitta* with a chubby little belly.

A young woman with this *agni* condition worked at a residential elder care facility. When at home, she followed a strict diet of brown rice, steamed vegetables and carrot juice. At work, she indulged in big portions of lasagna and stacks of Oreo Cookies. After explaining to her that there was in fact nothing wrong with lasagna for her constitution, we encouraged her to stash healthy treats at the elder care facility, so that Oreo Cookies would not tempt her. This strategy works well for both *visham agni* and *tikshnagni*. Creating a stash of suitable treats made with whole sugars or other natural sweeteners gives an outlet for the desire stimulated by the presence of poor quality sweets.

A good remedy to balance sweet cravings for *vata* can be prepared using Ashwagandha. Roast an ounce of Ashwagandha in ghee and add a tablespoon of date sugar. Store in a screw top glass jar in the refrigerator. This can be eaten in the morning about twenty minutes before breakfast, in the mid afternoon— if sweet cravings arise— and at bed time with a cup of hot milk. To help reduce the stress levels that exacerbate sweet cravings, tulsi tea can be used as a general beverage or Tranquil Mind formula can be taken three times daily. For adrenal exhaustion, Stress Ease can also be taken.

***Tikshnagni* and Sugar**

The individual with *tikshnagni* craves sweet, bitter and astringent foods. A sugary cup of black tea satisfies the desire for a mixture of sweet with astringent, a cup of sweet latte or a rich dark chocolate meets the need for a mixture of sweet and bitter. Unfortunately, caffeine and white sugar provoke *pitta*, intensifying *tikshnagni*. Thus, the more the *pitta* individual indulges in white sugar, coffee, tea and supermarket chocolate, the worse their *tikshnagni* becomes and the more strongly they crave sweets. Next, they begin to crave yeasted breads and sweet baked goods in an attempt to diminish their raging inner fire. Yeast, being sour, further provokes *pitta*, worsening *tikshnagni*. People with *tikshnagni* need extra protein, a slower burning fuel. Thus the empty calories of muffins, cookies, cupcakes and brownies only serve to make them hungrier. Soon they are twenty to thirty pounds overweight while being essentially malnourished.

A fifty year old real estate agent with a *pitta prakruti* presented with a lifelong history of *tikshnagni* and compulsive overeating. She came from an alcoholic family and had been an active alcoholic herself for ten years, a typical finding with *tikshnagni* and sugar addiction. She had a set of very strict diet guidelines that inevitably fell apart each evening. Until that point each day she perceived herself as a person who ate healthily and avoided dairy and processed flours. She took fruit for breakfast and typically ate a business lunch with her clients. Feeling remorseful about the size of her stressful lunch, she took only fish and salad for dinner. Like most stressed out individuals with *tikshnagni*, she began craving chocolate around four in the afternoon, but held back, determined to be 'good.' By the end of her austere dinner she was ready to spend the

rest of the evening consuming chocolate, ice cream and cookies. She was about forty pounds overweight.

Her troubles each day began with her fruit breakfast. Although this may be a good strategy for a healthy *pitta* with a tranquil life, fruit was not advisable for breakfast given her *tikshnagni* and the competitive nature of her job, with its stressful lunches. Instead of starting the day with the sweet taste, she could begin with bitter. A half teaspoon of Mahasudarshan in a teaspoon of honey works well for most people to diminish cravings for breads and sweets. This can be followed, twenty minutes later, by a breakfast containing protein. It is better to avoid a sweet breakfast altogether in this situation and to start the day with a small but complete meal such as a bowl of kitcheri and a whole wheat chapatti.

To regulate *tikshnagni* she could prepare Shatavari Kalpa. Roast an ounce of Shatavari with ghee and add a tablespoon of sucanat or turbinado sugar. This can be taken mid-morning and mid-afternoon to prevent hypoglycemia and to regulate *tikshnagni*. For stress and addictive tendencies she should drink Brahmi tea three times daily. She could also take Stress Ease three times daily.

Mandagni and sugar

For the kapha individual with *mandagni*, sugar addiction is truly a life or death situation. Waking sluggish and dull, kapha seeks energy from a donut or sugary cereal with cold milk. Although this gives a short burst of adrenal energy, these foods, to which a majority of individuals with *mandagni* are allergic, serve only to make him more sluggish and sleepy. Worse still, in kapha individuals, the insulin response is easily over stimulated. Whereas *vata* will burn all the sugar they consume in a frenetic rush of adrenal energy, *kapha's* body will immediately respond by storing sugar as fat. Gradually, the pancreas becomes more and more oversensitive, leading to a peri-diabetic condition of obesity, low energy and constant cravings for sweets and refined flours. White sugar and refined flour do not contain enough chromium for their own metabolism and thus deplete the body of chromium, essential to metabolism and to the functioning of the pancreas. Continued over-consumption of such refined foods will tip the kapha individual from peri-diabetes to diabetes proper, complete with retinopathy, neuropathy, arterial disease and diabetic ulcers. This is truly a high price to pay for a bowl of cereal and a Snickers Bar a day.

A forty year old financial planner had reached a level of *mandagni* so severe that not only wheat, dairy and sugar but even brown rice made him nauseated, tired, heavy and dull. He was sixty pounds overweight and lived on an energy roller-coaster, consuming caffeinated soda and sugar to get a burst of energy and then breads and cereal to calm him down. The breads made him tired and lethargic, so then he needed sugar and caffeine, which wired him, after which he needed more bread. In a few short years, if he did not change his ways, he would be diabetic.

He could be helped by taking a teaspoon of Shardunika after each meal or Sweet Ease formula three times daily. This would help balance his insulin secretion and reduce his craving for sweets. As with *tikshnagni*, a morning dose of Mahasudarshan would help with his craving for breads. Ten minutes before each meal he could take a half teaspoon of organic turmeric powder to aid in balancing the blood sugar load from that meal. To help reduce weight and kindle *agni*, he could use Trikatu. For stress he could take Bacopa tea three times daily or Mental Clarity formula, which would help with the sluggishness and lethargy that drove him to drink Pepsi-Cola.

In accordance with the basic principles of Ayurveda, although white sugar is a poison for all three *doshas*, its use must be handled very differently depending upon *agni* type. It is essential, as we have seen, to provide dietary counseling and to offer appropriate stress-reduction strategies, as sugar consumption is a manifestation of mental stress and a cause of physiological stress. Because of the importance of stress in the overall picture, it may often be wise to begin the treatment program with the appropriate stress-reducing herbs and to hold the other suggestions for a later appointment.

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