Myth: Candy Makes Your Kids Hyper
There is **no** evidence that children who consume a lot of candy will be hyperactive — none. It won’t stop you from hearing that “teachers will tell you the day after Halloween kids are more hyper than usual.”

But when this has been studied—and it has been studied and re-studied a lot—there is absolutely no association. It doesn’t matter if the kids eat items with lots of sugar, or chocolate, or sugar that is “natural.” It has been studied extensively in children who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and re-studied.

So why do “they” all say this happens? It is what we call confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is when you have a certain belief and every event that happens to confirm that belief you remember, and the evidence that opposes that belief you ignore. In fact, it may be the expectation of hyperactivity that causes the problem. One study looked at this from that perspective—what if it was **the parents expectancy** of children and sugar that caused the hyperactivity. So this was tested—and even if the kids were not given non-sugar (but the mother thought it was sugar) those “sugar expectancy” moms rated their children as “significantly more hyperactive.” And the conclusion of that study: “Behavioral observations revealed these mothers exercised more
control by maintaining physical closeness, as well as showing trends to criticize, look at, and talk to their sons more than did control mothers. For several variables, the expectancy effect was stronger for cognitively rigid mothers. “

So if you think something will happen, when you see it happen, it clicks – now your bias is confirmed. This is the hardest bias to overcome, for scientists, doctors, teachers, and lay people. Confirmation bias is the reason why so many people believe in things in spite of clear evidence to the contrary. You can see plenty of evidence of that in the comments of some of our blogs and our videos. Confirmation bias is the reason for racial prejudice, it is the reason for people believing all sorts of nonsense. Confirmation bias is the hardest bias to break people out of.

It is important to teach your kids to make healthy selections

There are plenty of reasons to limit the consumption of sugar in kids: it isn’t good for their teeth, it isn’t good for their health, it isn’t good for them to think sugar is a “treat” above all others.
What is good is for kids to appreciate and enjoy a balanced diet.

Still, there is room to improve our diet. It does appear that a diet of junk food in early childhood may result in problems with hyperactivity later in life – it remains to be seen the long-term impact. One thing is clear: if you eat at home with the family, eat a balanced diet, the chances of having obesity, or other problems are clearly diminished.

The theme of our upcoming book (an eating book) is that obesity, and a lot of issues, can be solved by having a balanced diet, learning to cook, eating meals at home. We have shown how parents have no idea what calories are in meals when their kids eat out – you can find that link here. We have also shown how if you get pre-made food you will have higher BPA levels (click here) – another reason to cook at home. Finally, there is no doubt that fructose is a major factor in obesity, and while occasional holidays are not a big issue, having a diet with a lot of excess sugar is never healthy (click here).

If you want time with your family, meaningful time– and wish to have a more balanced life, as well as diet– learn to cook, eat at home with the family– and enjoy the holidays.

REFERENCES:

Here is the study about mom’s who think their kids are more hyper with sugar even if their kids didn’t get the sugar:


This study looks at 23 different studies and came to the conclusion that sugar does not affect the behavior or cognitive performance of children, and that it is the belief of parents (confirmation bias) that may be the cause of the issue:


This is a summary of twelve studies that showed that sugar was not an issue, nor were food additives. No evidence that diet treatment was appropriate for behavior problems.


Some thought in addition to sugar, it could be sweeteners – this study showed it wasn’t an issue with either the behavior of the kids or their ability to think.


This is the study about long term effects of junk food. One also has to wonder if sitting down with families at a meal, cooking, and making it a family activity would have an impact.

About Dr. Terry Simpson
Dr. Terry Simpson received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Chicago where he spent several years in the Kovler Viral Oncology laboratories doing genetic engineering. He found he liked people more than petri dishes, and went to medical school. Dr. Simpson, a weight loss surgeon is an advocate of culinary medicine. The first surgeon to become certified in Culinary Medicine, he believes teaching people to improve their health through their food and in their kitchen. On the other side of the world, he has been a leading advocate of changing health care to make it more "relationship based," and his efforts awarded his team the Malcolm Baldrige award for healthcare in 2018 and 2011 for the NUKA system of care in Alaska and in 2013 Dr Simpson won the National Indian Health Board Area Impact Award. A frequent contributor to media outlets discussing health related topics and advances in medicine, he is also a proud dad, husband, author, cook, and surgeon “in that order.” For media inquiries, please visit www.terrysimpson.com.

Facebook • Twitter • Linkedin • Google • Youtube •

Share this article on social media!

Posted by Dr. Terry Simpson on October 31, 2012
Lynn

Children may become hyper after birthday parties and holidays but that may be as a result of an altered schedule or lots of excitement. If everyone cooks and eats at home, what will be with all the fast food restaurants?

October 31, 2012 at 12:36 pm

thedoc

Kids get excited because they get excited – and often around other kids, and having fun. I hope the fast food restaurants slow down to where people eat occasionally there.

November 1, 2012 at 11:12 am

Questions You Have About Type 2 Diabetes Diet Treatment | [...]

Index DietTreatment of Obesity – Childhood Obesity DietYorkie with Diabetic Ketoacidosis Myth: Candy Makes Your Kids Hyper // initialise plugins jQuery(function(){ // main navigation init [...]

...
Lynn

Uh don’t look now Doc but the Cookie Monster is now under scrutiny. He is on a diet and can only have cookies “sometimes”. He is getting the blame for childhood obesity.

January 20, 2013 at 10:25 am

thedoc

It isn’t the Cookie Monster- but the parent monster that lets his kids have the cookies (sometimes that is me)

January 21, 2013 at 11:01 am

More from Culinary Medicine

Dr. Terry Simpson | (480)500-5080
Airfryer Butternut Squash and Chicken

Using the airfryer to do meals in one setting is ok—although I prefer my chicken cooked Sous Vide Style—here is a video showing the whole thing. Give it a try!

Posted by Dr. Terry Simpson on April 14, 2018

The Mighty Meatball: Bringing Back the Flavor

We went to four countries to find the Norwegian meatball of my youth. In that journey we learned the history of the meatball, and finally – the recipe to make those great meatballs.

Posted by Dr. Terry Simpson on December 1, 2017
DASH Diet: First Line Therapy For Hypertension

The DASH diet was developed by science, not by notions. It follows current guidelines, and provides a healthy way to live. Here is the diet and sample menu plans.