



# *Is There Such Thing as a Sugar Addiction?*

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE REGISTERED DIETITIAN  
AT GEORGINA NURSE PRACTITIONER LED CLINIC

**Let's be honest - sweets and sugary foods are delicious. We think about them, we crave them, and sometimes we may feel that we eat more than we should. However, is sugar addiction a real thing?**

**Read on to see what the science says and learn how to manage your sugar cravings.**

## **The Science on Sugar Addiction**

In the past few years, there has been ongoing debate in the scientific community as to whether food addiction is a valid concept. On one hand, the idea of food addiction is similar in many ways to what we know from other substance addictions. For example, a "sugar addiction" seems valid given people can feel like they have little self control when it comes to eating sweets, they experience regular and strong urges or cravings for it, they continue to consume sweets despite knowing its negative impact on their health, and they likely have tried many times to "quit" or cut out sugar without success. On the other hand, studies have also argued against the idea of food or sugar addiction. Brain studies show that addictive substances "hijack" or change the brain's reward pathway in a way that food does not. Instead, food triggers our brain's reward pathway in a way that's similar to how other positive experiences like music and laughing also give pleasure but would not be something we consider to be addictive. It's also been found that increased desire for sugar only occurs in the context of restriction or unpredictable food access. When sugar is readily available, the increased desire does not occur.

Putting aside the scientific debate for a moment, it's important to recognize that a person's *feeling* of being addicted to sugar is a very real thing. Eating is complex and one can experience a variety of struggles such as overeating, feeling out of control, having very intense cravings, or using food as a source of comfort. So regardless of addiction or no addiction, here are some tips to help manage your cravings for eating sugar.

## **Tips on Managing Sugar Cravings**

As mentioned earlier, research has found that when we restrict food intake, we actually end up wanting it even more! Take some time to reflect on what thoughts you have toward your "trouble" food. Is it on your forbidden food list? Do you have rules around how to limit yourself from eating this food? Do you go for periods of time where this food is completely removed from your diet? If so you might be experiencing strong cravings as a result of this restriction. Normalizing and allowing this food back in your diet will be key to managing these cravings. This can be a challenging process and something that a Registered Dietitian can help guide you along the way.



## *Lemon Panna Cotta*

6 SERVINGS

### Ingredients:

2 tsp	Gelatin
3 tbsp	Water
1 2/3 cup	Milk
1 1/2 tbsp	Maple Syrup
1/2 tsp	Vanilla Extract
1/2 tsp	Lemon Zest
1 1/2 cup	Strawberries, diced
1/2 cup	Granola

### Directions:

1. In a small bowl, mix gelatin into cool water and set aside for 5 minutes.
2. Bring milk, maple syrup and vanilla just to a boil. Whisk in gelatin and reduce to a simmer. Stir in lemon zest and continue cooking while whisking for 2 minutes.
3. Strain and pour mixture evenly into 6 ramekins. Cover and place into the fridge for 3 hours or until set.
4. Serve each ramekin with 1/4 cup diced strawberries and 2 tsp of granola.

### Sources:

- (1) Westwater et al., 2016. Sugar Addiction: The State of the Science. *Eur J Nutr.* 55(Suppl 2): 55–69.
- (2) Gearhardt & Hebebrand, 2021. The concept of “food addiction” helps inform the understanding of overeating and obesity: YES. *AJCN*, Volume 113, Issue 2, February 2021, Pages 263–267
- (3) Sharp, 2020 (last updated). Is Food Addiction Real? How to Stop a Sugar Obsession? Retrieved from <https://www.abbeyskitchen.com/food-addiction-sugar-obsession/>
- (4) Image and recipe from Guelph Family Health Study, 2018. Family-Friendly Recipes Snack Healthy Snack Happy. Retrieved from <https://guelphfamilyhealthstudy.com/2018/07/24/snack-healthy-snack-happy/> on January 25, 2022.