

## The modern-day enemy

Timothy Ives will be presenting a lecture, titled 'Pure, White and Deadly', at the British Dental Conference and Dentistry Show (BDCDS) 2022. Timothy will be detailing the current challenges in changing both dental professional and patient behaviour regarding sugar intake.



### Stay away from unhealthy relationships

Timothy shares his thoughts on the population's relationship with sugar:

'I came across a colleague who was challenging their patients to cut out sugar, as part of their research regarding the relationship between sugar and inflammation in the mouth. I challenged this colleague to cut sugar out of their own diet – they struggled to do so, lasting only a day, which proves how difficult it can be, even for the experts.'

Sugar dominates the modern age – from the usual suspects such as chocolate and cake, to unassuming items like bread and pasta sauce, sugar is in almost all foods and drinks. The substance is highly addictive and its effect on health has been extensively researched. Its impact on oral health has been similarly highlighted, and helping patients cut down on sugar has been the goal of every dental professional in the field.

However, the nation's relationship with sugar is complex, and there are many interlacing causes that make getting to the root of the issue a challenge. Timothy continues:

'For my own research in early 2021, I persuaded a number of dental hygienists around the world to stop consuming added sugar for 28 days – the majority of them

failed. It took me around six months to work out why quitting sugar was so challenging – there were so many interesting variables, I struggled to narrow it down. I will share the main outcomes and what the professionals learnt on their journeys during my lecture.

'I'll be discussing the politics of sugar and why we're consuming so much compared to what we used to. Also, I want to talk about sugar and disease, and share the worrying statistics on diabetes, obesity and dental disease.'

Despite the well-known risks of sugar to health, it is still incredibly difficult to cut out. The overconsumption of sugar-dense foods has often been compared to drug addiction. A study<sup>1</sup> demonstrated that 'intense sweetness can surpass cocaine reward, even in drug-sensitised and -addicted individuals'. Thus, sugar addiction is a severe issue within patients and professionals alike.

'I want to talk to delegates about the ways they can change how they're putting out information on this topic to patients,' says Timothy. 'The dental hygienists that participated in my research actually went through a lot of the common side effects that come with addiction and withdrawals – quitting was hell for some of them! I want to discuss in my lecture the biggest reason for their failure, which includes an unknown sugar addiction.'

Due to its addictive nature, helping your patients reduce their sugar consumption is not straightforward. Sugary foods and drinks have become ingrained within our society – from birthdays to national and religious holidays, many patients may struggle to avoid the temptation. Even in day-to-day life, sugar is overwhelmingly and persistently present.

'Interestingly, I noted that people commonly offered sugar to the study participants – they would have a weak moment and give in to the temptation. It was quite concerning actually, that they had people in their lives knowing they were trying to cut out sugar, yet still offering it to them!

'This highlights a broader issue, that dental professionals have no idea what's going on in a patient's life, and what influence the people in their lives have on them.'

The pandemic may have further altered the nation's relationship with food, as Timothy comments:

'During the pandemic, it was a bit of a mixed bag regarding people's ability to quit sugar. Some had more time to think carefully and plan their meals more efficiently, whereas others who were more naturally addictive in their behaviour, and were perhaps bored, were more likely to consume sugar. It was largely dependent upon personality.'

'During the pandemic, a lot of people introduced xylitol into their diet, to use in cakes for instance. One person even made their own tomato ketchup and replaced all sugar in their house with xylitol – their kids didn't even notice!'

### Come and hear it for yourself

At this year's BDCDS, delegates can attend Timothy's enlightening lecture in the Hygienists and Therapists Symposium, and find out more about our unhealthy relationship with sugar and how to combat this issue. This topic is vastly important in all healthcare sectors, but even more so within dentistry.

### Reference

1. Lenoir M, Serre F, Cantin L, Ahmed S H. Intense sweetness surpasses cocaine reward. *PLoS One* 2007; doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0000698.

**The next British Dental Conference and Dentistry Show Birmingham will be held on Friday 13 and Saturday 14 May 2022, Birmingham NEC, co-located with DTS.**

**For more information, visit <https://birmingham.dentistryshow.co.uk>, or email [dentistry@closerstillmedia.com](mailto:dentistry@closerstillmedia.com).**