

# Can fruit make you fat? Natural sugar in fruit is 'fuelling the nation's obesity epidemic'

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Gone fruity: A natural sugar found in fruits could lead to obesity if it is used to sweeten foods

A natural sugar found in fruit is fuelling the obesity epidemic, scientists say.

A study has shown that fructose - which is used to sweeten soft drinks and junk food - might be more harmful than other types of sugar.

In tests, fat people given large doses of fructose were more likely to put on weight around the stomach than those given glucose.

Doctors say this 'intra-abdominal fat' is the most harmful type and is linked to diabetes and heart disease.

Pure fructose is found in fresh fruit, fruit juice and jam.

However, it also sneaks into our diet through the high-fructose corn syrup used in food manufacturing.

Concerns about fructose and high-fructose corn syrup have been growing.

Some experts believe they play a major role in the obesity crisis sweeping Britain and the U.S.

Scientists at the University of California put 33 overweight adults on a diet comprising 30 per cent fat, 55 per cent complex carbohydrates such as bread and rice, and 15 per cent protein for a fortnight.

For a further ten weeks they were moved to a diet in which a quarter of their energy came from either fructose or glucose, New Scientist reports today.

Both groups put on the same amount of weight - 1.5kg or 3.3 pounds.

However, volunteers on the fruit sugar diet put on more intra-abdominal fat, which wraps around their internal organs and causes pot bellies.

Those eating fructose also had higher levels of cholesterol.

The study, led by Dr Peter Havel, looked only at pure fructose - not high-fructose corn syrup. However the syrup breaks down into fructose and glucose in the body.

Dr Havel said: 'The question is what is the amount of high-fructose corn syrup or normal sugar you need to consume to get these effects?'

The finding suggests that the number of calories in food might not be as important as the type of sugar it contains.

A cake made with fructose could do more harm than one made with glucose.

A spokesman for PepsiCo, which sponsored Dr Havel's work, said: 'This is a very interesting and important study. But it does not reflect a real-world situation nor is it applicable to PepsiCo since pure fructose is not an ingredient in any of our food and beverage products.'

In a separate study, Dr Havel's researchers compared the immediate effects of consuming a meal in which 25 per cent of the energy came from either high-fructose corn syrup, sucrose, fructose or glucose.

The level of triglycerides - or fats - in the blood were all elevated to a similar level 24 hours after consuming fructose, sucrose or high-fructose corn syrup, but not glucose, according to the findings published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Sucrose breaks down into fructose and glucose in the body.

Dr Francine Kaufman, of the Keck School of Medicine in Los Angeles, said: 'It adds to what we have known for a long time.

'It's probably not a good idea to consume too much sugar.'

Experts point out that this does not mean we should stop eating fruit.

Fresh fruit contains relatively low levels of fructose - and the risks are outweighed by health benefits.