

## SUGAR-FREE SKIN

Does your sweet tooth rule your life? Do you feel sleepy after a meal or get irritable if you do not have your 4pm chocolate fix? Maybe you feel constantly wired and unable to cope with every day stresses. But what if your sugar addiction is ruining your skin as well as your waistline and sanity?

Whilst the role of nutrition is well acknowledged in terms of general health, it has been underestimated regarding skin. If you are between thirty and thirty-five, you may start to see the effects of glycation, which is now considered one of the main causes of premature ageing. Sugary foods attack and weaken collagen and elastin; they become brittle and the skin loses elasticity. Left vulnerable to UV damage, the skin starts to thin and turns leathery, uneven and dull. Adult acne might also be an issue because excessive sugar stimulates the oil glands and weakens tiny blood vessels, which can over time become spider veins.

Don't be too hard on yourself - sugar cravings are completely natural. We crave sugar because it turns into glucose in the bloodstream, providing fuel and energy. Because sugar enters the bloodstream quickly, the blood sugar rise causes a rush of serotonin, the feel good hormone. In the short term this cheers us up and calms us down. Highs are always followed by lows however. You end up feeling tired and lack concentration, so inevitably crave more sugar. The more uneven your blood sugar levels, the more uneven your mood. This vicious circle leaves both your appetite and weight spiralling out of control.

And it's not just cakes and biscuits. Sugar is everywhere, even in savoury foods such as sausages and bread. Watch out for hidden sugars in processed foods and avoid anything ending in 'ose': sucrose, fructose, lactose. Also beware of smoothies and fruit juice. Fruit is high in sugar but the fibre in the skin slows down blood sugar rises. Low-fat diets are full of sugar to replace lost taste and texture. Avoid artificial sweeteners: your body doesn't know the difference between sugar and sweeteners so responds the same way. When we eat more sugar than the body needs, it gets stored as fat on our stomach, thighs and hips.

If you can control your blood sugar levels, you can control cravings. Refined carbohydrates convert rapidly into sugar in the bloodstream. Swap refined for complex carbohydrates which release sugar far more steadily. Eat several small meals instead of fewer large ones and fill up on protein. Cut down on food which has sugar in the first three ingredients. A mid-afternoon snack will help keep your mind off a sugar fix.

Skin care companies have been looking for ingredients to counteract glycation for decades, but the best way is still to limit your sugar intake. You will be most surprised by the improved clarity of your skin. At Cosme we recognise the relationship between a healthy body and healthy skin. Skin care protects your skin from the elements, but good nutrition repairs your skin internally. Treatments should never be performed in isolation – our skin benefits from a holistic approach incorporating diet, exercise and lifestyle. If the thought of a future consisting of mung beans and lentils has you day-dreaming of biscuits, take heart. You don't have to give up sugar completely (you will just crave it more). 70% dark chocolate doesn't raise blood sugar levels nearly as quickly - so treat yourself guilt-free to a couple of squares every day.

