

“I am addicted to sugar. I eat way too much of it and can't control my intake:” Behaviour Change Strategies for limiting sugar consumption

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Introduction and Aims: Sugar consumption is associated with a range of harms including obesity and Type 2 Diabetes. It is increasingly recognized that over-consumption of sugar manifests similar patterns of loss of control, tolerance and repeated attempts to cut back as SUDs. If sugar is addictive, then the same cognitive and behavioural change strategies used for reducing other SUDs should apply. The aim of this study is to examine the applicability of an alcohol behavior change taxonomy for the reduction of sugar consumption.

Methods: We searched professional websites (i.e., government, health promotion, and treatment) and consumer developed content (i.e., forums, blogs) for the presence of cognitive or behavioural change strategies. A total of 47 sources were identified which yielded 1285 change strategies.

Results: Overall cognitive and behavioural change strategies were similar to those previously identified for alcohol. The most frequent category of change strategies was avoidance (e.g., restrict access to sugar) followed by alternatives (e.g., use stevia extract instead) and seeking knowledge and information (e.g., read nutrition information on food).

Discussions: This study found cognitive and behavioural change strategies were frequently used to limit or reduce sugar consumption. The types of strategies were similar to alcohol in terms of overall categories of strategies (e.g., alternatives, avoidance). However, there were nuanced differences between sugar and alcohol in terms of the content and description of strategies. These findings are potentially helpful for conceptualizing sugar as an addiction as well as for the development of interventions.

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