

"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 is consumed widely and excessively causing multiple health harms. Sugar consumption is symptomized similar to substance use disorders (e.g., bingeing, tolerance, withdrawal)¹⁻². Behavioural change strategies (BCS) are commonly used in addictions. BCS is a cognitive or behavioural action that is taken to reduce behaviour or substance use which can be undertaken with or without professional support. If sugar is addictive, then BCS should also apply. The aim of this study is to create BCS taxonomy for sugar reduction based on alcohol³, gambling⁴ and internet taxonomies⁵.

Methods

We searched professional websites (i.e., government, health organizations, media) and consumer developed content (i.e., forums) for the presence of BCS. A total of 47 sources were identified which yielded 1287 change strategies instances. Those were coded using pragmatic content analysis and organized into the Rubicon Model of Action Phases⁶.



Results

Overall, BCS were similar to those identified for alcohol, gambling and internet. The most frequent category was substance substitution (17.8%) followed by reduction (12.4%) and abstinence (12.0%). Professional sources had more discussion on substance substitution than consumers (25.8% vs 12.5%) and reduction (18.9% vs 8.0%). While maintain readiness had an opposite trend (1.0% vs 7.1%).

Discussion

The study found BCS were frequently used to reduce sugar consumption. BCS for sugar were similar to alcohol, gambling and internet with some nuanced differences 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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