

Sugar is the 'alcohol of the child,' says children's health expert

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A children's health expert in the United States says families should watch their consumption of sugar during breakfast — and calls it the "alcohol of the child."

Dr. Robert Lustig, a harsh critic of sugar consumption, says between breakfast cereals and juices, many children are eating far too much added sugar every morning.

He estimates that some children are getting half their recommended daily intake of sugars at the breakfast table, before much of the day has even begun.

"A standard breakfast cereal in the United States, and in Canada, contains about 12 grams of added sugar," he told CBC Radio's On The Go.

"The American Heart Association suggested that the top amount for children should be up to 6 teaspoons, which would be 25 grams. So there's half right there. Now if you throw an orange juice on top, you're already over your limit."

Lustig has called sugar "toxic," and has written anti-sugar books.

The doctor said sugar acts much like alcohol in the body because it's processed through the liver and has addictive qualities.

"They both end up being turned into liver fat, and we now know that liver fat is the driver of all the chronic metabolic diseases that have befallen western societies," he told On The Go, listing Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Sugar used as a 'hook'

Lustig said families should watch out for added sweeteners that go by other names, as these also have health risks if overconsumed.

"They know what sugar [is], how it's spelled," he said. "They may even have heard of high-fructose corn syrup, but I can guarantee you, they haven't figured out what demerara, panocha, evaporated cane juice [are]."

He says these differently-named sweeteners are metabolized in the body in a similar way.

"Sugar is not the only problem in our diet, there are many problems in our processed food diet," he said.

"But sugar is by far and away the greatest problem, and it is also the one that the food industry uses as their hook in order to get you to buy more."