

*Maryland State Bar Association*  
*Lawyer Assistance Program*  
*Wellness Tip Sheet*

## Why do recovering addicts crave sugar?

Maybe recovering addicts, like the rest of us, reach for sugary foods and drinks because they make us feel good. Think about it, it's 2:00 in the afternoon and you're at work and tired so what do you reach for, a soda, candy bar, donut or something else loaded with sugar.

Why do we crave sugar? What can we do to avoid it?

Blood sugar levels have an effect on our mood, energy level, and cravings for sugary foods. Sugar gives us energy and releases the chemical dopamine which is also called the "feel good" neurotransmitter. Recovering addicts increased dopamine with their drug of choice but now that they no longer have the drug they are substituting sugar to get that high. If, for example, alcohol was your drug of choice, it is very high in sugar. Therefore, turning to sugar is an easy and cheap way for a recovering alcoholic to increase their blood sugar level and dopamine, and to chase that high. You will even see someone who is trying to cut down on their drinking substitute sugar, often starting in the morning with sugary drinks and using sugar in a similar way that they used alcohol.

The high that is produced from sugar is very short lived and usually followed by, what some people call, a "sugar crash." The person physically feels worse, continues to crave sugar, and eat sugary foods. This is very similar to how someone craves their drug of choice. Over time, just like with their drug of choice, the person will need more sugar to get the same "high."

The most important part of recovery is to stay sober, but maintaining a healthy diet can also help you be more successful in your recovery as well as your work and life. If you eat sugary foods or drink sugary drinks your blood sugar will rise and fall more rapidly than if you eat protein. Think about how you feel after you eat a couple of cookies compared to how you feel after you eat a turkey sandwich. If you eat a lot of sugar you may feel more agitated, depressed, or anxious, which can lead to relapse. When you feel good it is easier to overcome cravings, especially in early recovery. Keeping your blood sugar level as consistent as possible by eating a healthy, balanced diet will minimize mood swings and can help you be successful in your recovery.

### **Eating Tips for a healthy Recovery:**

- Drink plenty of water. Try to drink 8, 8 ounce glasses of water a day. Staying hydrated helps your body maintain balance.
- To keep your blood sugar levels stable try to eat small balanced meals throughout the day. For example instead of 3 large meals, eat 5 small meals.

- Limit or eliminate caffeine.
- Eat protein rich foods. Try to stick to lean proteins like turkey, chicken, or fish.
- Eat high fiber foods like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.
- Avoid processed foods.
- Eat healthy fats like olive oil, nuts and seeds.
- Limit saturated fats
- Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables at least 5 servings a day.

For more information about eating healthy in recovery please call your Lawyer Assistance Program for **free, confidential** assistance at 443-703-3041 or 800-492-1964.