

TRANSCRIPTS

The Stress-Sugar Connection©

An exclusive podcast series by Wendy Padob, NBC-HWC and Cathy Ormon

Part 1 – The Science



Cathy Ormon, author-host of The Sugar Switch® Podcast interviews Wendy Padob, National Board-Certified Health & Wellness Coach and Founder of WP Creative Wellness

Welcome to *The Stress-Sugar Connection*! This series is designed to help you understand what's really going on between stress and sugar so you can take action to feel calmer and in more control of both.

Powerful change happens best in small, sustainable steps and the good news is that throughout this series, we're going to talk about change and how making a switch or change in one habit, like stress, will make it easier to switch or change the other habit, like sugar.

This is Part 1 and today we will be talking about The Science behind the stress-sugar connection with my Special Guest, Wendy Padob who is with me in my virtual studio. I am especially excited that Wendy will be joining me for this entire series, as it is going to be very informative and interesting. So, be sure to tune in every week!

My Special Guest, Wendy Padob, is a national board-certified health and wellness coach and mindful lifestyle educator specializing in stress management. She is CEO and founder of WP Creative Wellness, a private coaching practice in New York City, New York. Wendy works with women and men who seek work-life balance and relief from chronic stress, anxiety, job burnout, repetitive strain injuries and other stress-related issues. She also partners with mental health professionals across the U.S. to provide behavioral coaching to individuals suffering from severe stress, anxiety and depression associated with medical and psychological illnesses including chronic pain, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, cancer, PTSD and more.

Before becoming a coach, Wendy was a successful communications executive and a writer who spent over 2 decades working at leading ad agencies and Fortune 500 corporations where she experienced first-hand how stress can take its toll. Frequent travel, poor posture, sitting for long hours, constant deadlines, typing on computers, laptops and overusing her body led to multiple repetitive strain injuries. When the pain became debilitating, she had to stop working and go on disability leave.

Despite being advised by her doctors to give up writing, she made profound changes to her lifestyle habits and emerged healthier, more resilient and able to perform better than before. She is deeply committed to helping others prevent or rebound from chronic stress and transform their physical, mental and emotional health through her “Soar Above Stress” coaching programs that focus on a practice she calls ‘radical self-care.’

Before we get started, I believe it is important to differentiate between sugar cravings and sugar addiction, because they are different:

- While a person can have relentless sugar cravings, they might not actually be a sugar addict. Although, a sugar addict will *always* have relentless sugar cravings.

That might sound contradictory – so let me say that in a slightly different way:

- Just because you crave sugar – it doesn’t necessarily mean you are a sugar addict because there’s more to sugar addiction than just cravings. Yet – a true sugar addict will ALWAYS have relentless sugar cravings.

Welcome, Wendy! I am thrilled that you and I are working together in this series. You have incredible experience when it comes to stress, and we all know that stress and sugar are super closely connected.

Wendy: Thanks, Cathy! It’s a real pleasure to join you and help shed light on a topic that’s challenging for all of us – feeling stressed and craving sugar. Understanding the relationship between stress and sugar – and how one affects the other – can help us become more conscious of habits we have formed and learn how we can empower ourselves to make better choices so we can live with greater ease, balance, joy and wellbeing.

Cathy: We are starting off this series with a terrific topic – how science explains the connection between stress and sugar. Let’s start with stress...

Wendy: Stress comes in different ‘flavors’, so it’s important to differentiate *acute* from *chronic* stress because sugar affects each differently. Acute stress is short-term (such as meeting a tight deadline; driving in rush hour) and it can actually be good for you because it causes your body to release hormones like adrenaline that help you handle the situation.

However, if you are under stress too often or too long (such as getting stuck in traffic every day, or working for a toxic boss), acute stress can become chronic – and if ignored, can damage your health and immune system. But, as we’ll learn in this series, many stress-related illnesses like heart disease, type 2 diabetes and even certain cancers, can be

prevented by making healthy lifestyle changes to habits like reducing stress and sugar.

Cathy: According to science - how does sugar cause stress, and how does stress cause sugar consumption?

Wendy: Numerous studies have shown that physical or emotional stress increases our consumption of sugar. That's because stress unleashes high levels of the hormone *cortisol* which boosts our appetite and craving for sugary, high fat, starchy "comfort" foods like chips, French fries and pasta.

When we're under a lot of stress, we tend to binge or overeat for comfort, a pattern many of us recognize as *stress eating*, where we use food to deal with negative emotions. When we feel stressed, we crave sugar because when we eat it, another hormone – *serotonin* - kicks in that is calming and relaxing. So, eating sugar is our body's way of trying to chill out and de-stress but it only works temporarily. Sugar might make us feel better in the short-term, but the bittersweet truth is that it causes long-term physical stress to our brain harming our hippocampus in particular – that's the area that controls memory, spatial reasoning and self-control. So, there are solid scientific reasons to reduce stress and resist a quick sugar fix!

Cathy: Wow! The scientific part of it is so amazing! I am a visual person, so I just want to put this into a visual perspective. I have an image of a chain reaction within the body. Stress pushes a button called '*sugar and comfort foods*'; that instantly releases the hormone *cortisol*; cortisol physically causes us to eat sugar; then a lightning fast signal goes to the brain, releasing another hormone – *serotonin*; serotonin calms and relaxes us, making us feel better – temporarily. This whole biological chain reaction repeats over and over because we want the end result of continuing to feel good.

Here's the surprising part that many people don't realize, which is now proven by science: this biological chain reaction causes physical stress or damage to our brain, our cognitive ability AND our self-control. So – *the more sugar we eat, the less control we have over the situation.*

Wendy: Yes, the more stressed out we are, the more sugar we crave, eat and the less control we feel – it's a vicious cycle. And all those highs and lows cause serious imbalance in our bodies.

Cathy: Wendy, could you please tell us about stress-sugar imbalance, and what is going on in the body with that imbalance?

Wendy: Let's start with sugar, which comes from the foods we eat. Most people associate it with weight gain, but the effects go way beyond the waistline. Besides providing major highs and lows in mood and energy, a diet full of excessive sugar and refined carbs – not just the sweet stuff - can disrupt one of the most powerful hormones in our body - *insulin* - which is closely connected to all the other hormones in our body, including estrogen and testosterone.

Now *insulin* is produced by our pancreas and allows our body to either use the sugar from our food or store it for future use. It regulates our blood sugar: the sugar our bloodstream carries to the cells in our body that supply us with energy. Insulin tries to prevent blood sugar from getting too high or too low and cause an imbalance in our body.

Stress releases hormones that make our blood sugar levels rise the very same way as eating sweets, starchy foods or alcohol. And blood sugar levels affect our energy, moods and concentration, so if they rise too fast, our body can end up releasing too much insulin. This can cause our blood sugar to suddenly drop. And that rapid change can leave us feeling tired, stressed out, hungry and searching for more sweets to regain that “sugar high.” So this imbalance is sometimes referred to as the *blood sugar rollercoaster*.

Cathy: How can we tell if our blood sugar is balanced or imbalanced?

Wendy: When our blood sugar is balanced, we usually sleep well and feel energized, happy and productive. But when our blood sugar is *imbalanced*, we are either at a brief sugar high or at the bottom of a crash, and can feel irritable, anxious and drowsy from insomnia or not sleeping well. We can have other symptoms like mood swings, depression, poor concentration or what we call brain fog, excessive thirst, cravings for sweet foods and addictions to caffeine, soda, alcohol or nicotine.

And, if these symptoms aren't enough (!), if our blood sugar remains imbalanced frequently, our body starts to ignore the insulin message (a condition called *insulin resistance*) which can lead to permanently high blood sugar levels, weight gain, obesity and eventually type 2 diabetes.

Cathy: Many people associate sleep issues with stress, but not necessarily with blood sugar imbalance. So that's an interesting connection between stress and blood sugar imbalance and how it affects sleep.

At some point in the future I intend to do an Episode about sugar and sleep. A note for listeners: There are some previous Sugar Switch® Podcast Episodes related to what Wendy has already discussed, and I will list those at the end of today's Episode, because you might want to go back and listen to them.

So, Wendy, let's talk about stress eating and why stress and sugar cravings can lead to addiction.

Wendy: Well, for many people, having just a little sugar stimulates a craving for more. And that's because sugar has the same addictive qualities as drugs. Sweet foods—along with salty and fatty foods—produce ‘addiction-like’ effects in the brain, causing us to lose self-control, overeat and gain weight. So, if you crave sugar, lose control and eat more than you planned, you can get hooked! Sugar, like drugs, activates the very same “reward” system in the brain, so if you often eat sugar, you're reinforcing that reward over

and over, getting the same feeling you get from using morphine, marijuana and cocaine, which can make it tough to break the habit!

Unfortunately, the numbers speak for themselves. In the U.S. alone, people eat 19 teaspoons or more of added sugar a day! That adds up to 285 calories, which health experts say is way too much.

How much sugar should you be eating? Well, according to the American Heart Association, no more than 6 teaspoons daily, which for women is about 100 calories, and 9 teaspoons for men, which is about 150 calories.

Cathy: Wow, the numbers really reflect the unhealthy habits people have fallen into.

Wendy: Yes, but the *good* news is that we can change our habits! The first step is to become aware of what they are. So, listeners, what are YOUR stress and sugar habits? For example, do you work 70 hours a week or find you can't break away from your phone? Do you automatically reach for sweet snacks or sugary drinks on a daily basis? The fact is: you can retrain your stress reactions and your cravings for sugar.

Cathy: YES! Once you become aware of your stress and sugar habits, you become empowered to work towards making changes in your stress reactions AND your sugar habits. Remember that changing one of those two things will help you change the other.

And, we've made it easy for *you* to check your current habits with our short stress-sugar awareness quizzes. They're totally free and can help you be more aware of your lifestyle and unhealthy habits that you may want to improve or get a coach to help you change.

To take Wendy's Stress Awareness Quizzes, go to Wendy's website wpcreativewellness.com/stress-quizzes.

To take Cathy's Sugar Awareness Quiz, go to sugarswitchonequiz.com.

Cathy: Thank you so much, Wendy for joining me today! I am looking forward to speaking with you in the other Episodes in the series, starting with next week's Part 2....

Wendy: Yes, I can't wait to dive into the next topic with you, Cathy: Spotting the Warning Signs of too much stress and sugar! It should really help listeners tune into habits and behaviors they may not be aware of, so they can start thinking about making healthier choices.