

How to Tame that Sweet Tooth

This is The TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T, episode number 84.

Welcome to The TD Fitness Podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. And now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey, hey, hey, guys. Welcome back to TD Fitness. This is episode number 84 where we're talking about how to tame that sweet tooth. We all like sweets, right? And I am certainly guilty of it. I am one that enjoys sweets, not just from time to time, but actually pretty often. We're going to talk a little bit about that because there are certain things that lead to us wanting sweets more often than other times. And there are also ways to kind of curb that sweet tooth or tame it. Really, that's what I want to dig into here because this is one of the things that I've not only gotten questions about recently and have been asked for advice on, but I'm actually struggling with it and dealing with it right now. So I wanted to share some of the tips, strategies, and techniques that I've been using and also some things that I learned in researching this topic in preparation for this podcast today.

This isn't particularly important, I'll say. Because as you know, I tend to cater all of the topics here to those of us with busy lifestyles, whether we're busy with kids, busy with work, busy with moving, busy with you name it. There are so many different things that tend to take up most of the parts of our days. And when that happens, we have less bandwidth, and we have less of an ability to make healthy and smart choices, unless we are very diligent about planning ahead. But, it's so easy to get behind in that. So we're more susceptible to having those cravings, for example, those cravings for sweets, for example, when we're stressed. And stress is something that comes along with that busy lifestyle. It's synonymous with having a busy lifestyle. Like I said, I've seen it recently in, in myself, my own actions. I am living it right now.

For those of you who don't know, we're still in somewhat of a transition period here in the household. We just recently moved to a new state because of our jobs, and there's been a lot of eating out. There's been less time to cook. In fact, we didn't even get our household goods until very recently. We didn't even have any kitchen utensils, or any pots, or pans, or any of that kind of stuff. We're literally just unpacking boxes right now, getting from underneath all this stuff that the movers delivered. So, that's a big part of it. We've had to eat out, and that is not something that is normal for us. We do like to eat out, but certainly not every day when we're in our normal routine.

Then, we are so blessed to have such nice neighbors that in doing things out of the kindness of their heart tend to make sweet dishes, cakes, treats, and they bring those over to us as kind of a house warming gift. So here we have the kind of the perfect storm of not being able to cook, having to eat out every day and also having all these sweets in the house that what else are you going to do with them, right? Besides eat them. So, that's kind of where we are right now. I understand that that our situation may not apply to everyone, but certainly, like I said, there are some takeaways from this that I think can be beneficial to all of us.

So what is the takeaway here? That is that there are things that we can do to counter that sweet tooth, to curb the sweet tooth and to tame it. What I'll do is point out just a handful of different strategies, four strategies or so, that you can use to stay ahead of that. You can either combine them to tackle your sweet tooth or just pick one that is the most appropriate

for you and try to do better at it. Remember, it's about being better, about living better, not living perfectly. Small steps. We often talk about that here on The TD Fitness Podcast.

What I'll do is give you a couple of personal examples, like I said, that I'm living through right now. But before we dive into that, I want to reiterate the why. Why are we talking about this? Well, the danger is when you eat too many sweet foods or foods with added sugars and those types of things, the danger is that it causes changes in your metabolism. It causes short-term changes through insulin spikes. And over time, there are some long-term changes that take place, too, and you become more susceptible to weight gain and more susceptible to poor health. That is what we are trying to avoid. The busyness of our lifestyles, the added stress, the lack of sleep, and then the poor diet, those things all go into a lifestyle that is less healthy, and quite frankly could lead to a shorter lifespan. That's what we're trying to avoid here. That's why I want to point this stuff out.

Now, I do want you to know that you are not alone if you have a sweet tooth. Like I said, I definitely have a sweet tooth. You probably know others that do, too. And sometimes there are people who don't necessarily have a sweet tooth but are more apt to want salty foods. You may not know this, but what I learned, again, in part of the research here is that sometimes this is caused by a certain gene that some of us may have. Some studies have found that if you have a certain variant of this gene, you're about 20% more likely to seek out sugary foods and drinks.

Another reason that you may have that sweet tooth is because this ... I don't know if you've heard this term called supertasters. But, supertasters are more sensitive to bitter tastes and more sensitive to sweets simply because they have more of these types of taste buds. Again, that's a hereditary thing. It's a gene thing. Those people tend to have a reduced preference for sweet and high-fat foods. So if you're not a supertaster, then you're not as ... The sweet and salty foods and high-fat foods just don't They don't satisfy you because you're not as sensitive to those things. That's something to understand. If you're not a supertaster, then you could probably eat a lot of sweets, a lot of high-fat foods, a lot of salty foods, and it just ... It doesn't bother you. But some people, that bothers.

I know a lot of people who just don't like sweets, but that's because they are likely supertasters and they're more sensitive to those big tastes like that. Just understand that there are different types of people, and our DNA plays a big part in all of this. So it's not just that you ... It may not just be that you don't have "willpower," which is a term that I don't like to use often because there's actually a lot more to it than just motivation and willpower. But the takeaway here, or the point here that I'm trying to get across, is that DNA, your genes, all those things can play a part in why you are more apt or less apt to want sweet foods.

Now we kind of set the table, if you will. I want to talk about four things, four ways that you can help to curb or tame that sweet tooth. The first way is what I'll call resetting your palate. Sweet teeth don't just develop overnight. They develop over time. They also take some time to get rid of, to go away. But what we find is that the more sweets you eat, the more often I should say, the more often you eat those sweets, the greater your sweet tooth becomes. Similarly, or conversely, the less you eat sweets, the less often you want sweets.

The caution here is that it can ramp up really quickly because your palate very quickly adjusts to foods that are less sweet, and they no longer satisfy your taste buds. The way that we eat currently in America, there are so many processed foods and they are often engineered and created with high levels of added sugar, high levels of added fat and things to accommodate our taste buds because now we expect those highly sweetened foods and, like I said, those bold tastes. That is something that has developed over time, a lot of which you have no control over. It's just the food industry. Because ultimately, the point of business is to sell.

And what sells is things that satisfy. That's why it's important to first understand it and secondly understand how to counter that and to do things that are best for our health. But, that's a very vicious circle because you find yourself wanting sweets. And the more sweet you eat, the more sweets you want over time. That's a vicious circle and one we have to recognize and then try to control or avoid.

Now, making the sweet tooth go away is definitely possible, but it's not as ... It doesn't happen as quickly. You have to be proactive about it, and you have to train your taste buds. This is a real thing. I'm not making this up. This is something that all of us can do. No matter what palate you have, whether you're a supertaster, whether you're sensitive to those sweet, salty foods, or whether you're not and you want those sweet foods more often, you can actually train your taste buds differently.

It's actually not training your taste buds, but it's training your palate. Because what I found out, again, in researching for this topic is that taste buds regenerate about every 10 days. So if you're able to cut back on your sweets, after about 10 days, you'll find that those foods that are high in sugar, or high in salt even, will taste a lot sweeter than they did when you had more of those taste buds to kind of pick up on those tastes. Remember that 10-day point, okay? Because that goes into your plan when you gradually kind of cut back on the sweets that you consume.

Now, that is actually what I'm talking about when we talk about resetting your palate or weaning yourself off. There are some ways to do that. The first is to do just that, which is to gradually cut back. Some examples here. I like soda. I like sweet drinks. I know not to drink them all the time. In fact, we don't buy them for the house. We don't have them here at the house. Usually, all we have is water and milk. And when I have a soda, it's something that I really enjoy. But I'm very deliberate about that because usually only once or twice a week am I able to enjoy that. That's just, again, when things are normal. It's a lot harder, though, when you're in transition like this, but I'm talking normal, steady state.

But if you do like soda, one thing that I literally just recently tried today was my wife has been drinking tonic water or club soda and throw in a little spritz of lime or lemon. That has no sugar, right? But what I found is that if, for example, at the soda fountains where you can fill your cup with soda, I did about three quarters of that club soda or tonic water, and then I just did a quarter of a cup of a soda, sweet soda. It actually didn't taste that different at all than a full-blown soda. Because what I like about it, I've learned this about myself, I like the carbonation. But I don't like completely bland carbonation. I just like a taste of sweet. That is something that kind of scratches the itch, if you will, for my need or my taste for soda. So I'll be trying that more often instead of sodas on the few occasions that I have those. But, that's one way that you can start to cut back. Because now, essentially, instead of having a full, let's call it a 12-ounce soda, I'm having about four ounces of soda because only a quarter of it includes that sugar. So that's one way you can do that.

Another thing that I'm a sucker for is chocolate. I love chocolate. But what I found is that there's differences. There are different types of chocolate, different qualities of chocolate. You may have heard me talk about this before. I am now to the point where I really appreciate and enjoy a very deep, dark chocolate, which is less sweet than a milk chocolate, per se. It has different taste, different tones if you will. That's another thing you can do is if you like chocolate, maybe invest in some higher quality chocolate versus just your typical milk chocolate candy bar from the gas station, or convenience store, or something like that, and see how, how that suits you.

Another thing you can do, smaller portions. I mentioned that our neighbors are bringing over all these sweets like cakes, and cupcakes, and Rice Krispies Treats, and those things like that.

Some things just aren't the same in the low sugar variety. I'm not going to lie. If I'm going to have a dessert, I typically don't want the low-sugar version of that dessert. I'm sorry. That's just me. Instead, the way to control the amount of sugar is to cut back on how much of it I eat. In those cases, when you choose smaller portions, you can do that through slicing the cake thinner or only serving yourself a small portion. Don't bring the whole tray out, for example. Just put a little bit on your plate and then take it wherever you're going to eat it. Maybe splitting dessert with somebody over dinner. Those are all ways that you can control those portion sizes.

Then, the final example I'll use is coffee, because I have certainly ... I've gotten to the point now where I appreciate the coffee more than the sugar. What I mean by that is I have not always been a coffee drinker. I will say that I do drink coffee just about every day now. But early on, what I would do would, I'd get the sweet coffees, the frappuccinos or any of those sweet, sweeter coffees from the coffee shop.

But gradually and gradually, I cut back. For example, some coffee shops you can ask for light sweetness, and they'll put a little less of the sugary things in there. You can cut back on the amount of sugar that you put in yourself. You can go from the flavored creamers to straight milk, or to half-and-half, or to 2% milk. That's essentially where I am right now. My drink of choice is an Americano with just a splash of half-and-half. I find that the sugar in that, in those, that little bit of milk-type product, is enough to satisfy me.

In case you didn't know, milks have sugars in them. That is the lactose. Typically, things that end in O-S-E are different types of sugar. So in fruits, you have fructose. So whenever you hear those types of things, understand that there are a natural sugars in those foods.

Those are a couple of examples of how you can reset your palate and gradually cut back on your sugar intake. So again, the first strategy is to reset your palate trying to wean yourself off of so much sugar. Another thing you can do, number two here, is to manage your energy levels through what you eat. And here's what I mean by that. So when we're busy, oftentimes we'll go hours without eating. When that happens, our metabolism takes a dip. What you want is a somewhat constant level of metabolic activity throughout the day versus these highs and lows, and highs and lows. You'll find those lulls and those lows when you don't consume food because food is burned for energy. That particularly can happen when you're busy.

A good way to counter that, when you do eat, you should consume a source of fiber and protein just about every meal if you can. Also, snack smartly. Those things prevent those blood sugar highs and the blood sugar crashes. This combination of fiber and protein also produces a longer-lasting, or what I'll call a slow-released, fuel burst. If I go seven hours without eating and then I eat a piece of cake, that sugar has to be metabolized through the release of insulin, a lot of insulin, in my bloodstream. The more that that happens, the more frequent it happens, the more often it happens, over time, that can lead to excess weight gain. That's what we want to avoid. We want to keep the metabolism. We want to keep our metabolic levels pretty steady. That is done, again, by smart eating, consuming fiber, consuming protein and things like that, and not waiting for those long, long periods to eat.

We all know that the longer we go, the less self-control we have. Sometimes I get to the point where I haven't eaten for hours and what I really want is something that satisfies me right now. And guess what? The things that satisfy you right now are things like high-fat foods and high-sugar foods. That's essentially what a lot of fast food businesses are based on and founded upon. That's what you want to avoid.

So again, number one was resetting your palate and weaning yourself off of so much sugar. Number two is managing your energy levels through smart food choices. Now, number three,

use naturally sweetened foods. That's without added sugar, foods without added sugar. The first thing that comes to mind here is fruits. If you're not a big fruit person or you think fruits aren't sweet enough for you, one tip could be to start with baked fruit. Because when you bake a fruit, the natural sweetness tends to come out even more. Similarly, you could take advantage of certain spices like cinnamon, like nutmeg, or cardamom, or fenugreek, and ginger, all of those things. Natural sugar is not only better for you than added sugars and artificial sugars, artificial sweeteners, and so forth, but it's also balanced with fiber, which doesn't cause that big insulin spike that I spoke of.

I've heard a lot of folks who are really trying to live healthy say that, "You know, I don't eat fruit because fruit has sugar." Well, fruit does have sugar, but fruit also has fiber, and that is the key. Because it's not the sugar itself that's bad for us, it's the insulin spike. But when you have fiber, fiber controls how fast that sugar is released and how fast the insulin is released into your bloodstream. So, fruits are okay, all right?

Milk also has its own sugar, as I mentioned, through lactose. Milk, fruits, those are naturally sweetened foods. That's why when I drink my coffee, a little bit of milk or a little bit of half-and-half that's just fine. When I eat certain foods, if I put some fruit in there, that's just fine as well. Also, honey. Now, honey is a simple sugar, so it is ... It does indeed have calories as well, but it's not as bad as table sugar or added sugars in a lot of these processed foods.

So, be aware of those artificial sweeteners, too. That's not what I'm recommending at all. If something is sweet and has zero calories, then that means it has artificial sweeteners in it. I'm going to say that again because I think that's lost on us from time to time. If you're drinking or eating something and it tastes sweet and it says zero or no calories, then that means it's not sweetened with sugar. It means it's sweetened with artificial sweeteners. And the jury is still out on many, if not all of these artificial sweeteners, and the effects that they have on us, our metabolism, and our long-term health, so just be cautious there.

One final thing under the naturally sweetened foods category. I just want to tell you about a great smoothie recipe because this is my favorite thing. Basically, any combination of chocolate, peanut butter, and banana is ... I'm all in. I'll share a quick smoothie recipe with you. This is my chocolate peanut butter banana smoothie, but I start with about one quarter milk. Let's say a half cup of milk or so, a large scoop of chocolate powder. And I'm not talking about just sweeten chocolate powder. In fact, I'm talking about the dark chocolate powder that is unsweetened. If you put a large heaping tablespoon of that in there with the milk, throw a banana in there, a heaping tablespoon of peanut butter, which, to be fair, does have added sugar, at least the peanut butter that I use, but it's not as bad as actually putting sugar in the smoothie. Understand, though, that peanut butter, a lot of peanut butter, does have a little bit of added sugar in it. I'll throw a pinch of raw oatmeal in there, a couple of squirts of honey, which, again, is a little bit sweet, and then some ice. Mix it all together, you got a great smoothie.

What you have there, too, though, is I talked about protein and fiber, right? So you have protein through the milk and peanut butter, and you have fiber through the fruit, the banana, and the oatmeal. But, it is delicious. A lot of times I will eat that in the evening because that satisfies my sweet tooth, but it also fills me up a little bit because of the fiber and because of some of the healthier things in there. Just wanted to throw that out there, that recipe. Milk, unsweetened chocolate, dark chocolate powder, banana, peanut butter, some raw oatmeal, honey, and ice.

Now, the fourth and final tip or strategy that you can use to tame that sweet tooth is to use your environment to your advantage. Your environment can be a help or a hindrance. The biggest thing here is if you find that you're susceptible to eating sweets, whether it's late at

night or during the day, then don't keep it in the house. That is the strategy that we use more than anything else. Because if it's here, then I will likely try to eat it. When ops are normal, it's easy to keep that stuff out of the house, right? Understand, though, that your environment plays such a huge role in your habits. But again, if it's not around, you can't eat it.

You can also keep small things around like little sweets, I'll call them. Those are things like the smoothie that I mentioned, some fruit. Sometimes I'll even have a bowl of cereal in the evening to quench that taste for sweetness. I'm not talking about a sugary cereal. Typically, it's just some kind of Cheerios or something like that. Again, the milk has sweetness, too. I also like dark chocolate covered almonds. Again, going back to that fiber and protein, that's another source of that.

Those are the kind of the strategies that I recommend. The takeaway here, as I wrap this up, I want you to understand that the danger in too much added sugar and letting that sweet tooth control the way you eat is those insulin spikes, and your susceptibility to gaining weight, and overall poor health over time. Remember that habits determine your health. Remember those four things. You can reset or retrain your palate. You can manage those energy lows through the food you consume. You can use naturally sweetened foods, like fruit, and you can control what's in your environment. You set the environment.

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