

Sweets and desserts: irresistible temptations (allowed in just the right amounts)

Many sweets and desserts are overloaded with both sugar and fats. In this case, the dietary danger lies with the excessive total caloric intake and not specifically the sugar.

The real problem lies with the speed with which the simple carbohydrates, and consequently sugar, are digested and metabolized.

Diet fanatics have firmly condemned table sugar contrary to the scientific reality.

Thanks to the persuasive ability of mass advertising and the loud protests by critics of sugar—a group that includes the manufacturers of artificial sweeteners—attempts have been made to force people to give up sugar in their coffee or prevent them from eating a pastry or ice cream.

It has never been demonstrated that sugar can cause illness (not even diabetes, which has complex genetic and environmental causes), with the exception of dental cavities in subjects with poor oral hygiene or people more likely to develop cavities because of their naturally lower salivary pH.

Not even obesity can be blamed simply on an excessive sweet-tooth. The majority of the severely obese prefer other types of food, those that have a greater fat content with 9 calories per gram and not just the 4 calories per gram found in sucrose or any other simple or complex carbohydrate.

However, it is true that many sweets and desserts (containing sugars, a heterogeneous family of molecules all with a sweet taste but with an extremely varied bromatological composition) are overloaded with both sugar and fats. In this case, the high number of calories is the real danger and not sugar in particular.

The INRAN Guidelines that we mentioned earlier dedicated one of its titles to this debate: “*Sugars, sweets and sugary drinks, allowed in just the right amounts.*”

It should be mentioned that table sugar used for sweetening (ie, sucrose, extracted from sugar cane or sugar beet, consisting of a molecule of glucose and one of fructose) is a completely natural product even when refined. In nutritional terms, its molecule is easily metabolized, similar to fruit sugar or honey.

The problem lies in the fact that the refining process allows us to consume an excessive quantity in a small volume, and as we have repeated several times, all the food of high-energy density are a risk for people who live an excessively sedentary lifestyle.

A standard apple, weighing between 150 to 170 g, contains no less than 15 to 18 g of simple carbohydrates; however, it also includes fiber, vitamins, and minerals and can create a sense of fullness that can certainly not be compared to the corresponding 3 teaspoonfuls of sucrose (15 g) that we would have used to sweeten a drink.

The real problem lies with the speed with which the simple carbohydrates and, therefore, sugars are digested and metabolized.

Glucose, in particular, provokes an immediate rise in the glycemic levels, which should correspond to an appropriate production of insulin, the pancreatic hormone that controls the entrance and the utilization of glucose inside our cells.