**Self-Control by Sugar**

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In the morning, it is a lot easier to resist eating that cookie for breakfast. At lunch, it is a bit harder, but you go for a yogurt instead. By dinner, the urge feels near impossible to resist. At midnight after hours of homework, you eat the cookie. Self-control is what we use to restrain desires and impulses. Researchers have found that self-control takes from a set energy source within us. Every time we use a small amounts of self-control throughout the day, it draws from this energy reservoir, making each consecutive effort of self-control more and more difficult. This is referred to as “ego depletion.” The more you regulate your responses, the more you deplete your energy. Psychologist and professor, Roy Baumeister of Florida State University, compares self-control to a muscle. Like a muscle, self-control gets tired and loses power after use. However, like a muscle, self-control can become stronger with exercise over time, even in unrelated aspects of life. For example, smokers who resisted sweets or did hand grip exercises were more successful at quitting cigarettes. Baumeister and his team did a study where subjects skipped a meal and then were given a bowl of radishes and a bowl of cookies. One group was to eat the radishes and not the cookies. One group was to eat the cookies, and a third group skipped this part all together. They then were given an insolvable geometry puzzle and were timed on how long before the participants gave. They found that the first group, who resisted the cookies, gave up drastically sooner than the other two groups. This showed that resisting such temptations takes a certain amount of energy, later effecting other areas of life. They concluded, this is the reason for night time, after a demanding day is when most diets fail, sexual misdeeds occur, and addictive behaviors appear (Baumeister).

A large part of self-control is about making decisions. The more decisions we make throughout the day, the more our self-control is impaired. This may be an interesting explanation for why many politicians, who make decision after decision, end up in sex scandals or illegal behavior. They’re job is to make decisions all the time so that their self-control for ordinary things becomes even more difficult (Baumeister).

Ask any science student where our energy comes from and they’ll say glucose. Glucose is the source of our energy; the source perhaps that this self-control is referring to. A link has been found between self-control and glucose levels. After people exert some self-control, their blood glucose levels drop. They had students perform simple task in a lab and saw their blood glucose levels dropped. They then participated in a self-control lab test, and similarly they performed lower than if they had not done the previous task (Baumeister). An interesting study was done on glucose levels in judges, tying together decisions, self-control, and blood glucose. Judges are given cases throughout the day where they have to decide to let convicts out on parole, a risky decision that could reflect poorly on their careers if something were to go wrong. Or, they decide to send them back to prison, the easier, safer decision that in turn would take less self-control. They found on cases that were brought to judges early in the morning, when judges had eaten breakfast, they tended to grant parole often. Throughout the day, the longer the judges went without a break or food, the more likely those prisoners are to be sent back to prison. Parole rates then increase again after lunch. In fact, they found the cases right before lunch have a near 0% chance of being granted parole, while cases directly after lunch have a 65% chance of parole (Danziger et al.).

It was also found that with an increase in ego depletion, aggression increases, and a restraint on aggressive impulses is weakened. Researchers studied couples and found that even nonviolent couples treated one another in more abusive ways when they had an increase in ego depletion. This could be important in preventing abusive relationships. If psychologists can teach couples to exercise and strengthen self-control, they can potentially reduce relationship violence (Baumeister).

Eating more food to keep your blood sugar up, probably isn’t the best dieting technique. However, exercising your self-control and recognizing it is not your complete lack of willpower when at the end of a long day you can’t resist skipping homework to watch Netflix. Having better self-control techniques have been a strong predictor of high performance in school and work (Baumeister).

Bibliography

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