Sugar Industry Has Had Evidence Linking Sugar to Heart Disease for Nearly Half a Century

Project 259 is a study that linked sucrose, a common sugar product, to heart disease and bladder cancer and would have revolutionized the way we think about sugar in regards to our health. Or at least it would have…if the sugar industry hadn't stopped funding it halfway through the project in 1971. The project was discovered by a team of researchers at the University of California San Francisco who have been in the news for other reports on the sugar industry's unsavory practices.

Details of the Project

Project 259 was launched by the Sugar Research Foundation in 1968. The project was in two halves, and only one of them was completed. The finished portion of the project looked at rat's gut bacteria after rats consumed sucrose compared to starch. Early results showed that the sucrose caused gut microbes to throw off those rodent metabolisms, increasing their levels of triglycerides. Elevated triglycerides clog arteries and increase a person's predisposition for cardiovascular disease. Project 259 also found that in a comparison to high-starch diet, a high-sugar diet boosts the activity of beta-glucuronidase, an enzyme linked to bladder cancer, when compared to a starch diet.

These discoveries were reported to Sugar Research Foundation in 1970. The results accompanied a request for 12 additional weeks of funding to finish the second half of the project, which was outlined as a deeper look at the effects of starch.

Within a month, the Vice President of the Sugar Research Foundation declared these findings as nil and the additional funding never materialized. Project 259 was abandoned in 1971.

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Who Tells The Story

The sugar industry does not see this as a story. According to Courtney Gaine, the president and CEO of the Sugar Association, “They never called us. We would have let them look at the archives. I would let them look tomorrow. The story we have in our archives is a lot better than the story they’ve been telling,” She asserts that this study was lost in a bureaucratic shuffle, and emphasizes the industry’s ongoing interest in negative claims.

The sugar industry has a vested interest in controlling the story of sugar and health’s relationship. More than anything, Project 259 disrupts a narrative that was already being put into place. The same researchers who found this study also uncovered a letter in the Harvard library that revealed the truth of that. Two prominent and now deceased Harvard researchers, Harvard nutritionists, Dr. Fredrick Stare and Mark Hegsted, were responsible for disproving studies that implicated sugar and concluded that there was only one dietary modification – changing fat and cholesterol intake – that could prevent coronary heart disease. Their work was published in 1967 and didn’t require disclosure of industry funds, although these newly found records state that the sugar industry trade group initiated and paid for the studies, examined drafts, and laid out a clear objective to protect sugar’s reputation in the public eye. Yes, the sugar industry wants to know about negative studies but not to offer an informed choice.

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Most Frustrating “What If” Ever?

Sugar (especially the way we process and refine it) is more detrimental to the human body than anyone had previously thought, but what would our quality of life look like if this study was published? What would our sweetener options even look like?

Rates of heart disease, the number one cause of death in the world, would be far less than they currently are, and the ripple effects from consuming less sugar would be huge. Would we be facing the same level of antibiotic-resistant bacteria crises? While the majority of the blame for that coming storm can be placed at the factory farming industry’s doorstep, sugar feeds infection like no other food. Would doctors and dentists need to prescribe antibiotics at the rate they currently do?

This is all speculation. Infuriating speculation, at that, as that potential future is gone.

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We Should Be Angry

Not everyone who has heart disease has a history of heart disease in their family, but through the over-consumption of sugar, we have bred that predisposition into millions of people’s genetics. Anger and outrage are a daily occurrence in the current news cycles though and making this another cause for anger doesn’t send a strong enough message.

What if you stopped and said no more to products with large quantities of added sugar? Chose a different salad dressing or committed to figuring out a quick and tomato sauce recipe that kept you from reaching for the sugar-laden, jarred version on the shelf? Instead of choosing foods that create problems

while willfully ignoring them, dictate your own health and choose foods that heal.

Sources:

- *Sugar industry withheld possible evidence of cancer link 50 years ago, researchers say* – PBS
- *How the sugar industry artificially sweetened Harvard research* – PBS
- *How the sugar industry tried to hide the health effects of its product 50 years ago* – The Verge
- *Uncovered Coca-Cola Emails Expose 3 Ways Big Food Casts Doubt on Science, Endangering Public Health* – Alternet
- *Stop Eating Like That and Start Eating Like This – Your Guide to Homeostasis Through Diet* – Organic Lifestyle Magazine