

“Added Sweeteners: Are high-fructose corn syrup and other sweeteners fueling the American obesity epidemic?” *Harvard Health Letter*. 2006 (12):1-3.

To the Editor,

We read with interest the October 2006 *Harvard Health Letter* article entitled, “Added sweeteners: are high fructose corn syrup and other sweeteners fueling the American obesity epidemic?”

The author’s basic premise that Americans could control caloric intake, and thus weight gain, by limiting caloric soft drink consumption is correct in a very limited sense. After all, he could just as correctly have stated that Americans could control caloric intake by limiting consumption of French fries, hamburgers, bratwurst, rice, beer, mashed potatoes, bacon, strawberry daiquiris and steak. If you don’t believe that weight control can be achieved through any number of calorie restriction schemes, just peruse the diet book aisle at your local bookstore.

Our concern, however, is that his focus on fructose as a problematic sugar is alarmist when it needn’t—and shouldn’t—be. Studies showing untoward metabolic responses with fructose are based on highly predictable and prejudicial diets: it has been known for fifty years that diets exceedingly high in fructose and exceedingly low in glucose can produce metabolic aberrations. But data gathered under these conditions should rightfully fail the “irrationality” test, since no one on Earth—not one person—eats a diet of this highly contrived composition. Significantly, no such untoward effects have been shown with typical diets containing a balance of fructose and glucose at commonly consumed levels.

Despite the recent rash of advice warning consumers to avoid sugars as dietary evils, the most effective message to consumers remains the simplest: limit calories from *all* sources—whether from fats, alcohol, protein or carbohydrates—and increase levels of exercise.