Too much fructose can damage your liver, just like too much alcohol

There is growing scientific evidence that one of the most common types of sugar, fructose, can be toxic to the liver, just like alcohol.

Fructose is the sugar that makes fruit taste sweet. For most people, there’s nothing wrong with eating fructose in its natural state, in fruit.

But today, the companies that make processed food take the fructose from corn, beets and sugarcane, and remove the fiber and nutrients to process the food. The high doses of fructose in our processed foods is more than the amount our bodies were designed to handle.

What’s unique about fructose is that, unlike any other sugar, it's processed in the liver, just like alcohol. Small amounts of fructose are not a problem for your liver. Think of eating an apple - its sweetness comes with a lot of chewing that takes time. The apple’s fiber slows down its digestion.

But when we consume large amounts of fructose in added sugar, particularly in liquid form on an empty stomach, it shoots it into the liver, giving it more than it can tolerate, causing a fatty liver.

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) = excess fat build-up in the liver.

How do you know if you have a liver problem?

• Blood tests will check for NAFLD (Non-alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease): Triglycerides and ALT
• Some early studies have also linked sugar consumption to human cancer and cognitive (brain function) decline.
The Toxic Truth about Sugar

Sugar also has clear potential for abuse
- Like tobacco and alcohol, acts on the brain to encourage eating/drinking more.
- Interferes with the hormone leptin, which helps to produce the feeling of fullness.
- Reduces dopamine signals in the brain’s reward center, decreasing pleasure received from food, and encouraging the individual to consume more.

Where’s the Fat?
- A sugar belly occurs when the liver detects more fructose than can be used by the body for energy.
- The extra fructose is broken down by the liver and transformed into fat globules (triglycerides), some of which go into the blood and deposited around your midsection and internal organs.
- Just as people who drink too much get a "beer belly," those who eat or drink too much fructose can get a "sugar belly."
- Fat cells that ‘hang out’ around your midsection send out messages that upset your body's normal chemical balance.
- These imbalances may be related to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

How to intervene - How can we reduce sugar consumption?
- If your waist is larger than your hips, ask your doctor for a blood test that checks for triglyceride levels.
- Eat less processed food (often this is food that comes in a bag or box).
- Eat whole food (fruits, vegetables, whole grains).
- Plan your meals so you think ahead, cook, and use whole ingredients.