

Desserts with a low glycemic index may benefit weight-loss efforts for obese children

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Overweight girls lose more weight and can better stay on a healthy diet if they eat sugar-free, low-fat desserts several times weekly, as opposed to any dessert once a week, a new study finds. The results will be reported Monday at The Endocrine Society's 93rd Annual Meeting in Boston.

"Dieters commonly splurge on dessert once a week, usually choosing fattening items," said lead investigator Antonia Dastamani, MD, PhD, a pediatrician and research fellow at Athens University School of Medicine in Athens, Greece. "However, we found a positive effect of more frequent consumption of desserts that have a low glycemic index and low glycemic load."

Carbohydrates have a low glycemic index (GI) if they raise glucose, or blood sugar, levels more slowly than other carbohydrates do. The glycemic load (GL), which depends on serving size, is the food's total effect on blood sugar.

"Studies suggest that low GI/GL diets have a positive effect on weight control and improving insulin resistance," Dastamani said.

Obesity can cause insulin resistance, in which the body does not properly use the [hormone insulin](#). This results in high [blood sugar levels](#) and sets the stage for development of diabetes.

Dastamani and her colleagues tested the effects of incorporating into a [balanced diet](#) certain low-calorie, low-GI/GL desserts containing sugar

substitutes such as sucralose. The products are made by the Giotis Company, a food production company in Athens, which donated the desserts and helped fund the study.

The investigators studied the effects of two diets in 29 girls, ages 10 to 14 years, who had a [body mass index](#) (BMI) in the 85th percentile or above, considered overweight or obese. A group of 15 girls ate a diet consisting of 45 percent carbohydrates, 35 percent fats and 20 percent proteins, including the low-GI/GL desserts four times a week. The other group of 14 girls followed the same diet except, instead of the low-GI/GL desserts, they ate desserts of their choice once a week.

After three months on the diet, both groups improved their BMI (body composition). Compared with the second group, however, the group that ate the low-GI/GL desserts lost significantly more weight and had better average BMI and systolic blood pressure (the first number in a blood pressure reading), the authors reported.

Girls who ate the low-GI/GL desserts also had significantly improved levels of the appetite-suppressing hormone leptin, the researchers found. They also had better improvements in biochemical markers of [insulin resistance](#) (fasting insulin levels in the blood and the homeostatic model assessment, or HOMA, index).

"Childhood obesity is pandemic, and dietary changes among overweight and obese children must be a priority," Dastamani said. "Desserts with a low glycemic index and glycemic load, when eaten in moderation, are valuable tools in the treatment of pediatric obesity."

Provided by The Endocrine Society

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