Healthy Investments: Sugar is a treat, not a habit

By: Justin Gasper
Tuesday, July 22, 2014

When my extended family gets together my little cousin always jokes about his "dessert stomach" after finishing his dinner plate. No matter how much this towheaded little boy eats for dinner, he can always find room for dessert. While it is cute for a child, I must admit that I too am afflicted with plenty of room for dessert long after dinner sounds appetizing.

Perhaps many of us grew up being told we had a "sweet tooth," a natural inclination to get lost in a sea of candy bar wrappers and baked goods. But recent draft guidelines from the World Health Organization suggest that the problem might be far more widespread than an inherited love of sugared goodies from mom or dad.

Naturally, sugar occurs in foods that are high in potassium and fiber — foods like pineapple, oranges and bananas. Unfortunately, these wonderful nutrients are

absent in most of our favorite sweets like sodas, candy and dessert.

Fructose, the sugar in fruit and all refined sugars does not provoke a response from our digestive system that tells us we are full. In natural sources like fruit, this is fine because fruit is packed with fiber — which makes us feel full — and nutrients that we need.

But in sugar, honey and corn syrup, we simply do not respond to the calories and there are no vitamins or nutrients that help us. Added sugar is everywhere; it can be found in breakfast cereals, granola bars, yogurt, soda and even ketchup.

Since it does not make you feel full, it usually gets tacked on to whatever calories you have already consumed to get rid of your hunger.

Do you have to skip sweets forever? No, the new WHO guidelines suggest less than 5 percent of total calories can be comprised of refined sugar — about a can of soda or a serving of dessert per day. But be wary of that gnawing craving for sugar and make it a treat, not a habit.

Justin Gasper writes a regular Healthy Investments column on behalf of HopeSource in Ellensburg.