

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads
—Clement Clarke Moore

“Attend to the little one who holds onto your hand.”
—From the Epic of Gilgamesh

Christmas Children Peep into Christmas Windows

Clement Clarke Moore captured the ideal Christmas scene in his famous poem “The Night Before Christmas:” snuggly beds, children, kerchiefs, sleighs, reindeer, Santa and, of course, *sugar plums*. There is no denying that the holidays are inseparable from indulgence in the sweet taste. This phenomenon makes perfect sense from the perspective of Ayurveda, a holistic medical science from India. Ancient Ayurvedic texts explain the concept of Rasa, or taste, and how the six tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent affect our body, mind and spirit. Of the six tastes, sweet is the most nourishing. It represents the first taste we had as infants and is related to love and nurturing. It creates a feeling of satisfaction and assists the mind in developing endurance against stress. It reduces judgment, anger and anxiety. Eaten in moderation, sweet foods enhance strength, longevity, and stability.

According to Ayurveda, the sweet taste includes foods such as milk, butter, grains, meat, nuts, sweet fruits, dates, maple syrup, honey, sugar and other sweeteners. It makes sense that in places like Wisconsin—where the winters are cold, dark and long—that people would gravitate toward these foods. It literally takes the edge off of the *bitter* cold. It is, however, possible to have too much of a good thing. Overindulgence in sweets can damage the pancreas and spleen, leading to diabetes mellitus, obesity, *ama* (toxin) formation, lowered *ojas* (immunity) and an inability to withstand stress. Also, if one is feeling a lack of love or nurturance in his or her life, he or she may seek contentment from sweet foods. When sugar is consumed to fulfill an emotional need or used as a love substitute it can lead to complacency, foggy thinking, dullness and over-satisfaction.

The innocent victims of over-indulgence in the sweet taste are often children. Because kids naturally gravitate toward the sweet taste, adults often offer candy and baked goods to kids as a way of rewarding, bribing, pacifying or getting on a child’s good side. It is common for parents to say that they do not want to deprive their child of sugar to the point that he develops hang-ups or sugar obsessions. Let’s face it though, there are a lot of sweet foods on the market that provide insufficient nutrition for our children and have short-term and long-term negative effects on their health. According to Dr. Joseph Mercola, “the number one source of calories in the U.S. is high fructose corn syrup.” Consuming high fructose corn syrup, or just corn syrup for that matter, elevates insulin levels—and elevated insulin levels are the foundation of nearly every chronic disease known to humans: cancer, heart disease, diabetes, premature aging, arthritis, osteoporosis, etc.

In addition to corn syrup, many candies and desserts contain food coloring, additives, preservatives, artificial sweeteners, trans fat and MSG. There are myriad

sources of information on the deleterious effects of these ingredients. Food coloring can cause increased hyperactivity in children not to mention roller-coaster emotions, erratic behavior, delirium and suppressed immunity. The scope of this article is too narrow to discuss clinical studies on the effects of these foods. Because there is a significant amount of discrepancy from one study to the next it is difficult to sort through fact and fiction. Anyway, what ever happened to people paying attention to how certain foods make themselves and their children feel rather than depending on a study to tell us what to do?

The big picture is that the number one need that our children have is LOVE. Once an adult becomes aware of a pattern for offering sugar as love and decides that this is a habit she wishes to break, it opens up a window that exposes a gigantic vista ripe with creative possibilities. In lieu of offering sugar, a parent can provide the child with a listening ear, one-on-one time, a back scratch, massage, reading time, a nature walk, a game or eating a wholesome meal that includes foods from the Ayurvedic sweet list—but only of the highest quality. The great yoga teacher, Swami Adhyatmananda, advocates that a parent gaze into their child's eyes every day. By being present in body, mind and spirit for our children, the sweet tooth can be satisfied at the profoundest tip of its root.

This holiday season, do something creative: fly to your window like a flash, tear open the shutters and throw up the sash and unveil new horizons for your family. Create the picturesque scene in your home with all the warmth, peace and mirth depicted in "Twas the Night Before Christmas." Appreciate your children with all your energy and choose treats that bring lasting satisfaction and true love.

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Sugar Plums

Modified from Saveur Magazine

2 cups whole, organic almonds

1/4 cup raw honey

2 tsp grated orange zest

1 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

1/2 tsp ground allspice

1/2 tsp freshly grated nutmeg

1 cup dried organic apricots (be ware of preservatives), finely chopped

1 cup pitted medjool or deglet dates, finely chopped

1 cup confectioners' sugar (optional—organic versions available)

Preheat oven to 400F. Arrange almonds on a baking sheet in a single layer and toast in oven for ten minutes. Set aside to cool and then finely chop or place in a food processor. Meanwhile, combine honey, orange zest, cinnamon, allspice, and nutmeg in a small bowl. Mix almonds, apricots, dates and spice mix in a large bowl. Mix well. Pinch off rounded teaspoon-sized pieces and roll into balls. Dust the sugar plums with powdered sugar and refrigerate in single layers between sheets of wax paper in airtight containers for up to one month.

http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_6210.cfm
<http://userealbutter.com/2007/11/18/sugar-plums-recipe/>