

HOW TO CUT DOWN

Here are some nutritionist-recommended ways to cut down on the amount of sugar you eat.

- **Check your cereal box.** When buying cereal, look for those with no more than eight grams (two teaspoons) of sugar per serving. Measure your cereal so that you're consuming a single serving versus two and thus 16 grams (four teaspoons) from one food.
- **Go slow.** Slowly reduce how much sugar you add to your coffee or tea. If you normally put two teaspoons, try one for a week. Then try half a pack.
- **Cut out/down on sweetened beverages.** A 12-ounce can of soda may contain 39 grams of sugar (140 empty calories) and put you well over your limit for the day. Go for water or seltzer flavored with a twist of lemon or lime. Lots of sugar can be lurking in fruit juices and flavored waters too. If you really want your juice, dilute it with unflavored club soda or seltzer.
- **Opt for healthy snacks.** Rather than processed foods to which sugar is added, go for slices of fresh fruit, popcorn, pretzels or a handful of nuts.
- **Work with a nutritionist.** A registered dietitian nutritionist can evaluate your habits and provide ongoing strategies for change, says Nancy Farrell, a nutritionist in Fredericksburg, Va.
- **Modify your recipes.** Cakes or cookies will taste just as good when baked with less sugar. As you do with your coffee or tea, reduce the amount in the recipe a little bit at a time.
- **Don't substitute with artificial sweeteners.** "Personally, I am not an advocate for use of artificial sweeteners unless you have diabetes," Farrell says. "Artificial sweeteners are hundreds of times sweeter than regular sugar and can raise the threshold of what I call your personal 'sweetness scale.'"
- **Be patient.** According to Farrell, it takes three days to stop a craving, three weeks to change a habit and three months to get rid of a behavior.



BY STEPHANIE BOUCHARD

Hypervigilance helps keep combat soldiers alive in the field, but it can be detrimental to civilian life.

According to VA's National Center for PTSD, in a given year 11 to 20 of every 100 Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom veterans have PTSD, and 12 of every 100 Gulf War veterans have PTSD. Thirty of 100 Vietnam War veterans have experienced PTSD in their lifetimes.

"What happens is they come home and can't break out of that way of thinking," says Samantha Epstein, education manager for K9s for Warriors. "They know logically that they're at Walmart and not in a combat zone, but emotionally they can't just turn it off." Trained service dogs can help these veterans engage life again, she says.

K9s for Warriors, a Florida-based nonprofit that provides canines to veterans with PTSD, traumatic brain injury and/or military sexual trauma, is one of a number of private organizations nationwide seeking to provide emotional support dogs to veterans.

Service dogs for PTSD and other mental health-associated injuries are not supported by VA, as are those for physical disabilities. VA states there is not enough clinical evidence confirming a therapeutic effect, but efforts are underway. Introduced in Congress in 2016 and 2017, the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) Act would establish a five-year pilot program through VA to pair veterans with PTSD with a trained service dog and produce a study on the program's effectiveness. The American Legion has testified in support of the PAWS Act.

Clinical studies are occurring, too. VA is in the midst of a multiyear study to determine the efficacy and costs of using dogs to treat PTSD, and Purdue University – working with K9s for Warriors – is studying the effect of service dogs on PTSD symptoms in veterans.

Preliminary results from the Purdue study were reported in February's *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. They suggest that trained service dogs help lower overall PTSD symptoms and improve mental health and well-being. Purdue has now begun a long-term research project, funded by the National Institutes of Health, to continue studying the subject.

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