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Pictured: Stevia, a rainforest herb and natural, zero-calorie sugar substitute. Reducing sugar intake among youth may improve mental health and curb bullying, violence and the rash of school shootings in the U.S., says 1968 ski racing Olympian Suzy Chaffee. (orgsites.com)

How A Healthier Diet Can Reduce School Violence and Shootings

ICTMN Staff January 03, 2013

In a recent op-ed, Suzy Chaffee, 1968 ski racing Olympian and co-founder of the [Native American Olympic Team Foundation](#), suggests holistic approaches to reduce gun violence.

She offers many recommendations for schools: increasing emotional support and nurturing for youth, making classes smaller to allow for more individual student attention, offering daily sports or dance activities, providing children with art classes and gardening opportunities, etc.

But Chaffee strongly emphasizes the role a healthy diet can play in child mental health and thus reducing school violence. For instance, Chaffee notes, when Los Angeles school districts eliminated sugary sodas from its vending machines, school violence went down by 65 percent, reported NPR.

Chaffee also highlights a June 2011 study that found “processed sugar causes brain damage, memory loss, depression, and other mental health challenges.”

As an alternative to sugar, Chaffee points to the “extraordinary rainforest herb” Stevia, discovered by South American tribes, that can be used as a healthy sugar replacement.

“The rebaudiana extract from Stevia is the only known natural sweetener with zero calories, zero carbohydrates, and a zero glycemic index, which gives you zero fluctuations in blood glucose and zero contributions to any disease,” Olivia (Cherokee), a Master Gardener and Chaffee’s advisor, told her.

In addition, Japan has one of the lowest rates of gun violence among all countries—something Chaffee thinks may be attributable to the fact that Japan has used Stevia since the 1970s when it banned the “toxic” sweeteners Aspartame, Sweet & Low, Equal and subsequently Splenda. “Stevia prevents energy and emotion swings and chemical imbalances from sugar overdosing that can exacerbate dangerous behavior in abnormal, as well as normal kids,” Chaffee writes. Because of this, a shift in diet could help reduce bullying and end cycles of shooting in American schools, she says.

Chaffee also notes that wheat (including most breads) and dairy products cause a person’s blood sugar to spike drastically, thus resulting in a depressing withdrawal and depletion of energy. (Related: [Three Reasons Wheat Makes You Fat, Raises Risk of Diabetes](#), and [Wheat Is Addictive and Causes Weight Gain](#))

Chaffee gives an example of the mother of a son with Asperger’s syndrome who was disrupting the classroom regularly. Once she eliminated wheat and dairy products from his diet, he was “amazingly transformed.” Chaffee recommends substituting these bread, wheat and dairy products with gluten-free breads and pastas that are now available at health stores.

Read Chaffee's full article: [International Solutions to U.S. School Shootings](#).