UCSF pediatric endocrinologist Robert Lustig is frustrated by the food industry's marketing wars involving sugar. As the public learns more about the dangers of high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), the food industry is turning back to sucrose (cane or beet sugar), using the marketing tactic that sucrose is "natural" and therefore somehow "healthier."

According to Dr. Lustig, all sugars should be considered unhealthy due to its inherent molecular makeup. Both sucrose and HFCS contains one molecule of glucose and one molecule of fructose. Although it is a carbohydrate, fructose acts biologically like a fat, and in large doses is toxic to the liver -- the only organ that can process fructose. With greater consumption of fructose, triglycerides, insulin, and blood pressure all increase, obesity worsens, and type 2 diabetes ensues. Furthermore, fructose acts on the brain to block satiety and increase consumption, leading to a vicious cycle of sugar consumption and disease. Tragically, fructose consumption is creating an epidemic of fatty liver requiring drastic intervention: UCSF surgeons performed liver transplants in two obese children whose organs were destroyed by soft drinks. Fortunately, there are two antidotes to fructose: fiber that helps
slow the absorption of fructose and exercise that helps burn off fructose before it is metabolized to fat in the liver. Unfortunately, both are in short supply in our current Western lifestyle. Dr. Lustig will present these findings at Digestive Disease Week in Chicago on June 2.