The subtitle of this book is “The Hidden Truth Behind America’s Deadliest Habit and The Simple Way to Beat It.” First, anytime an author makes a claim that our deadliest habit can be simply fixed, one must raise the skepticism level. Jeff O’Connell has a mission that is the theme of Sugar Nation. That is, we as a nation, must stop eating our way into diabetes, which is going to be epidemic among baby boomers.

O’Connell has a very personal stake in the disease. His father is profiled throughout the book as dying from the disease. Although largely estranged from his dad for many years, diabetes brings them together as the author visits him in his final days. O’Connell also discovers he has diabetes and works to cure himself through diet. O’Connell is a long time health writer formerly at Men’s Health and Weider Publications, and now works for a bodybuilding website.

Much of what O’Connell says is not new. He does, however, write a compelling narrative on how diabetes has emerged as a pandemic and why our eating habits have accelerated the growth of the disease. O’Connell is not a fan of prescription drugs because it does not address stopping the disease, but merely making it survivable. He wants to prevent and cure it in its most prevalent Type 2 form. While he admits drugs can have a place in treatment, it is only after dietary changes have been tried first. He thinks drug companies are largely to blame in pushing doctors to use drugs rather than prevention.

O’Connell advances the diet of low carbs and largely rehashes the theory that increased insulin requirements for our increased sugar diet causes weight gain. By cutting out all processed sugar, he says we can cut Type 2 diabetes rates dramatically. He is highly critical of the USDA for its carbohydrate-heavy food pyramid. He blames the influence of the processed food industry for pushing low-fat, high-carb diets. O’Connell also blames the ADA for promoting the heavy carb diet despite the fact that diabetics are advised to eat low-sugar content foods.

Sugar Nation is one of the best recent reviews of our diabetes crisis because O’Connell makes his arguments highly readable and understandable. This is not a dull public policy or overly scientific medical book. O’Connell’s Sugar Nation is more of a personal odyssey of how the disease destroyed his father and how the author decided to avoid his dad’s fate through taking dietary control of his high sugar. There is no doubt that despite his decision to eschew drugs, most Americans will continue to eat poorly and take pills instead.

One thing that has been evident is that the high-carb diet is winning. Carbs are addictive and there is little evidence of a decline in sales of pretzels, chips, fries, bread, pasta and other sugars. O’Connell tells a convincing story on how to use diet to avoid diabetes, but drug companies have little to fear from the American public who show no desire to give up their tasty fast foods and snacks.

Sugar Nation
The Hidden Truth Behind America’s Deadliest Habit and The Simple Way to Beat It
By Jeff O’Connell
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Reviewed by Robert Ehrlich

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Robert Ehrlich, chairman and chief executive of DTC Perspectives Inc., regularly reviews books about the pharmaceutical industry, marketing and advertising for DTC Perspectives magazine. He also writes a weekly e-newsletter providing insights on pharmaceutical marketing trends. To subscribe to this FREE weekly analysis, sign up at the website, www.DTCPerspectives.com. Ehrlich can be reached by e-mail at Bob@DTCPerspectives.com.