



SUGAR

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JOURNALIST, BLOGGER AND
MASTERCHEF STAR **SARAH WILSON**
THOUGHT SHE WAS SUPER HEALTHY
BUT THEN REALISED SHE WAS
ADDICTED TO THE SWEET STUFF



I quit sugar two years ago as an experiment that kept going and going. It turned into an e-program that's been followed by more than 70,000 people, a series of e-cookbooks, and now a coffee table bogk. As far as sugar addictions go, mine was the gnarliest kind. I mean, I ate well. Annoyingly well.

I was that person mocked by work colleagues, for toting overly earnest packed lunches to the office and nibbling on trail mix in meetings. I snacked on superfood bliss balls. I took my chocolate dark and my chai tea with honey.

But the wholefood-y facade was concealing a desperate, incessant need for a lot of sugar.

It was a Coke and a Mars Bar diet dressed up in health evangelist's clothing. Nobody could challenge me because my diet looked so convincingly brown and fibrous. I'd even seduced myself.

I've since given people like me a name: granola-holics. And my experience on my own sugar-free journey has shown that we granola-holics are particularly resistant to stepping down from our low-fat, agave-sweetened pulpits to try a more savoury life.

I initially quit sugar as an experiment for a magazine column. I gave myself two weeks, to see how it felt. Of course, like most people with addiction, I viscerally resented the idea and was arrogantly convinced I was the last person who needed to adjust their diet. I didn't drink sugar in my coffee! I hated ice cream! Lollies bored me! It wasn't until I sat down and added up just how much sugar I ate in a day that it hit home: I was eating more than five times the amount our bodies can handle.

I took a typical day and broke it down. A glass of juice in the morning, a bowl of muesli with some fresh banana on top and low-fat

yoghurt, a fruit salad mid-morning, a chicken and salad sandwich made with low-fat mayonnaise, a few squares of dark chocolate in the afternoon and pasta with tomato sauce for dinner followed by a handful of goji berries (I always needed something sweet after dinner). It came to about 34 teaspoons of sugar.

And that was before I pulled apart the "hidden" sugar in the bread and the balsamic vinaigrette on my salad at dinner. My research for the column confirmed we're designed, metabolically speaking, to consume about six to nine teaspoons of sugar a day. And that sugar is sugar, whether it comes as white granules, honey or in a freshly squeezed organic juice. I soon met detractors, mostly fellow granola-holics. But we're meant to eat sugar, they'd tell me. Well, yes, we're meant to eat glucose. We need glucose for fuel. But we're talking fructose here (table sugar is half fructose, half glucose) and our bodies quite simply lack the hormone that signals to our intricate metabolic systems when it's in our bodies. In short, we have no "off switch" to tell us when we've eaten enough of it, which is why we can eat a whole packet of Tim Tams without getting full.

Plus – just to round out the fun – our livers can't recognise nor process fructose and so, in a state of confused panic, stores it as fat the instant it's ingested. Coupled with the constant insulin spiking that's sparked by all this, you can see how sugar wreaks havoc.

Up until 100 years ago or so, fructose was hard to come by. Fruits were a lot more bitter, too.

Experts say when we did get access to it, we were actually designed to binge on it. Why? Precisely because it's such a fantastic source of instant fat. Which was great when we were cavemen wandering the Savannahs.

But now, not so much. Today we're bombarded with fructose.

And we certainly don't have any need for the extra fat stores.

So eat less. Moderation is key, the detractors would retort. The problem is sugar, or fructose, has been shown to be as addictive as cocaine. Moderation is nigh impossible; just ask anyone who's battled to eat just the one Tim Tam.

Finally they'll hit me with: But sugar is natural! So is petroleum and arsenic, I'd reply: And I guess this is what it boils down to for me: it's natural for us to be exposed to – and to eat – only the smallest amount of sugar. But sadly this is not our reality. One hundred years ago we ate one kilo of sugar a year, now we eat 60kg a year.

I also boil things down to other simple realities.

The first: I tried quitting sugar, as an experiment, and it made me feel good. Really good. So I kept going. I lost weight, stopped getting 3pm energy slumps, my energy is now even, and I don't obsess about food. I have an autoimmune disease and many of my symptoms abated when I quit sugar.

People who tried my eight-week program have lost up to 55kg and have reversed hormonal, diabetic and cholesterol illnesses by doing so I say to detractors now, just try it.

Don't like it? Then eat your sugar.

The second thing: quitting sugar is not the big shake-up some like to make it out as.

In essence, you're simply eliminating processed food. It's not a diet. It's returning to eating as our grandparents used to. Honestly, this makes more sense than any granola-holic has ever been able to.

I Quit Sugar by Sarah Wilson is published by Pan Macmillan, RRP \$34.99. For more information go to www.sarahwilson.com.au

MY SWEET. SECRET SHAME

I WAS a sugar addict. I didn't look like one.

I didn't drink Coke or put sugar in my coffee. I've never eaten a Krispy Kreme doughnut, and ice cream bores me.

But here's the thing: I was a covert addict. I hid behind the so-called "healthy sugars" such as honey, dark chocolate and fruit, which made things harder in some ways because first I had to face my denial.

Growing up on a semi-subsistence property, my family ate

very naturally. My attachment began when, as a teenager, I moved into town from the country. A cocktail of girl hormones, new-found access to malls and convenience stores, as well as a kid-in-candy-store delight with foods I'd previously been denied meant I went sugar crazy.

I remember at university not being able to function if I didn't have a cinnamon scroll at 10am. I loved the pink icing blob in the middle. And convinced myself the dried currants made it healthy.

Over time this wasn't enough.

I'd then eat an apple pie after lunch. And some chocolate. Soon, I was riding a horrible roller-coaster of sugar highs and lows. I was bingeing. Then, feeling guilty, I would starve myself the rest of the day.

I got sick off the back of this reactionary eating – very sick. I developed mood disorders and sleep problems and finally I developed adrenal issues and my first auto-immune disease – Graves, or overactive thyroid.

Ever since, I've had stomach problems linked to poor gut balance and have developed further auto-immune issues, most recently Hashimoto's.

Over time I swapped my processed sugary carbs for "healthy" sugary treats. And, yeah, I ate less sugar overall. But all the symptoms still continued. I didn't put it down to sugar completely, but I knew it was a major player.

For the past 10 years I've eaten very well. But up until two years ago I was still eating too much sugar every day. After every meal. I was still addicted.

5 SUGAR TRAPS TO AVOID

THESE foods are granola-holic, health food shop favourites and are brimful of sugar.

LOW-FAT YOGHURT

When manufacturers take the fat out of dairy they have to replace the taste and texture with something. That something is sugar. A "natural" low-fat individual tub of yoghurt can contain 6 teaspoons of sugar.

AGAVE

This fashionable sugar-substitute is made from a South American plant and is marketed as "low-GI" and healthy. Beware! It's 70-90 per cent fructose.

MUESLI

Choice magazine recently found that some mueslis, promoted as "low fat" and healthy, contain more sugar than Coco-Pops – up to 44 per cent sugar.

DATES & GOJI BERRIES

Any product containing a lot of dried fruit is going to be a fructose frenzy. When you take the water out of fruit, you're left with a lot of sugar – about 50-70 per cent – with dates being the worst culprits.

FRUIT JUICE

A 375ml glass of apple juice contains the same amount of sugar as the same-sized glass of Coca-Cola – about 10 teaspoons. Some vegetable juices, such as beetroot and carrot, are also high in sugar. Eat your veggies and fruit whole.



Sugar sucker Sarah Wilson managed to kick an addiction of "the gnarliest kind".

