

# Quit and win

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Sarah Wilson is enjoying the sweet taste of success after forsaking sugar, Karen Hardy writes

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Sarah Wilson is enjoying a healthier life after giving up sugar.

It's hard to imagine that someone as sweet as Sarah Wilson could be at the centre of a sugar war. On *A Current Affair* recently she was one of several experts quoted in a story about sugar and the campaign calling for a tax on soft drinks to help combat obesity.

"I popped up as a sugar-quitting expert," Wilson says on her blog, [sarahwilson.com.au](http://sarahwilson.com.au). "However, I was used mostly as a voice of extremeness, via some quotes I've made to *ACA* journalists previously, repackaged in rather extracted form."

Rather than get angry, Wilson, who's about to release the hardcopy version of her highly successful *I Quit Sugar* (IQS) program, is revelling in the opportunity to talk about something that she's very passionate about.

"I don't tend to get upset by these kinds of things. *ACA* presented an interesting take on the subject. And besides, how splendid! I now have a great opportunity to clear things up nice and crystal-like."



Sarah Wilson popped up as a "sugar-quitting expert".

For a start, she eats fruit. About five pieces a week. She recommends eating low-fructose fruit where possible: kiwi, berries, grapefruit . . . And while the eight-week IQS program does recommend giving up fruit for the first six weeks, "to break the sugar addiction and to recalibrate our bodies, just for that short period", at the seven-week mark it is reintroduced so people can gauge how their bodies react.

She refers to research from the American Heart Foundation, which says our bodies are only able to handle six to nine teaspoons of sugar a day.

"Which is about the amount contained in two to three pieces of low-fructose fruit . . . If fruit is your only source of fructose in a day, then two to three pieces of fruit is fantastic."

For Wilson personally, it's the amount her body can handle before she starts to feel the effects.

It was her body that steered her down the IQS path. Growing up as the eldest of six children, she lived on a semi-subsistence property just outside of Canberra, and the family ate "very naturally".

It wasn't until she moved into town as a teenager that "a cocktail of girl hormones, 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".



Sarah Wilson's *I Quit Sugar*.

Studying at the Australian National University, Wilson says she couldn't function without a cinnamon scroll at 10am, "convincing myself that the dried currants made it healthy". This soon wasn't enough. There would be apple pie after lunch, and chocolate. "I was riding a horrible rollercoaster of sugar highs and lows. I was bingeing, then feeling guilty. I would starve myself the rest of the day."

Wilson became sick off the back of this "reactionary eating". She developed mood disorders, and sleep problems, adrenal issues, and Graves - an autoimmune disease that leads to overactivity of the thyroid gland. She's also had stomach problems linked to a gut imbalance and was diagnosed with Hashimoto's disease - another autoimmune disease that affects the thyroid.

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So after doing extensive research and interviewing experts (she says that's the journalist in her) she decided to quit sugar, "just to see what happened", and after only two weeks she felt so much clearer and cleaner she decided to keep going.

"I wasn't draconian about it ... I just remained curious," Wilson says.

Talking to Relax before Christmas, Wilson had no idea that the ACA story was on its way, no idea that she'd be painted as an extremist.

Dr Alan Barclay, the human nutrition manager at Diabetes Australia, New South Wales and media spokesperson for the Dietitians Association of Australia, was quoted in the ACA story accusing Wilson of "nutritionism" - of focusing on one nutrient at a time, such as the way that fat was pilloried in the 1990s - and slammed both Wilson and David Gillespie, author of *Sweet Poison: Why Sugar Makes us Fat*, for having no scientific qualifications to back up their calls to quit sugar.

"David and I are not claiming to be impartial scientists or doctors with no agenda. We both are really open: we were curious, we tried quitting sugar for ourselves, we read up on research around the world, and now we're sharing the information and our personal experiences. We're also open about the fact we sell books on the matter."

Even back before Christmas, Wilson was all fired up about the experts and some nutritional bodies who don't disclose their side interests in the debate. According to Wilson, Barclay also represents Glycemic Index Ltd, the body that hands out a "tick"-like "GI" symbol to companies who pay them to. One such company is sugar giant CSR, she says.

"It baffles many why a scientist or dietitian would be so hell-bent on slamming people like me who argue we shouldn't be eating so much sugar," Wilson says. "It seems an odd thing to get fired up about if you're engaged in nutrition, no? Unless there's a vested interest."

Two years later, sugar no longer plays a role in her diet but it's playing an increasingly important role in her life.

Via her blog, she chronicled her sugar journey, writing about the steps she was taking, the recipes she was cooking, how she was feeling and what the experts were saying. In January last year, she published the IQS e-book and cookbook.

The hardcopy version is out this week. "Some people still like actual books," she says laughing. And she's also starting up a website specifically dedicated to quitting sugar: [iquitsugar.com](http://iquitsugar.com). "My lifelong goal now is to encourage people to eat good food," she says.

■ *I Quit Sugar*, by Sarah Wilson. Plum, \$34.99.

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