

THE SUGAR *solution*

Addicted to sugar? Here's how to break free





It's hardly a newsflash that we eat too much sugar. I know that you know that eating sugar isn't doing you any favours. I can tell you right now that your sugar habit is the reason you're not losing weight, you experience cravings, and your energy levels are on the floor.

I'm not telling you this to scare you. Think of it as a wake-up call.

The white stuff is ubiquitous. It goes without saying that you'll find it in sweets, cakes and cookies. However, you'll also find it creeping into practically every type of processed foods (which is why you don't realise you're eating so much) – even some of the least likely. Whoever heard of sugar as an added ingredient to flavoured crisps?

But cutting it out (or even cutting down) can feel hard – especially if you have spent years using sugary treats to give you enough energy to get through the day or as a reward for something you achieved.

In this handy guide, I'll give you the lowdown on where to look to cut added sugar from your diet as well as plenty of inspiration for alternative breakfasts and snacks – often where the sugary products can sneak in.

Ditch SUGARY TREATS

When you start the day with a bowl of cereal, in pretty much every case, you're starting with a bowl of sugar. Even those cereals we supposed should be 'good for you' featuring bran and fibre are full of sugar. Breakfast cereals commonly aimed at children have the equivalent sugar content of two and a half chocolate biscuits.

Cereals highest in sugar (per 30g serving*)

- Aldi's Harvest Morn Choco Rice 12g
- Kellogg's Frosties 11g
- Kellogg's Crunchy Nut 11g
- Morrisons Honey & Nut Corn Flakes 10.9g
- Sainsbury's Honey Nut Corn Flakes 10.9g
- Kellogg's Coco Pops 10.5g
- Sainsbury's Choco Rice Pops 10.5g
- The Co-operative Choco Rice Crispies 10.5g
- Essential Waitrose Choco Pops 10.5g
- Lidl Crownfield Choco Rice 10.5g

SOME YOU THOUGHT
WERE *healthy!* (per 30g serving*)

- Alpen Original Muesli (6.9g)
- Nestlé Cheerios (6.2g)
- Kellogg's All-Bran Bran Flakes (6g)
- Dorset Cereals Simply Delicious Muesli (5.1g)
- Kellogg's Special K (5.1g)
- Nestlé Shreddies (4.5g)

*The 30g serving is a myth, too. Even children would eat more.





Easy BREAKFAST SWAPS

Boiled egg with wholemeal toast soldiers

Scrambled egg on wholemeal or rye toast

Overnight oats

Porridge

Greek yoghurt and berries

Stewed apples, with yoghurt and sugar-free granola.

Banana pancakes

(Make simply with 1 small banana and 2 eggs. Mash).

Muffin frittata or omelette

Double Check FOOD LABELS

“Sugar free” or “no added sugar” often doesn’t mean it has no sugar, but maybe the sugar is disguised as something else. This is code for ‘we found another way to make it sweet and you’re not going to like this much either.’

Concentrated fruit juice of any kind is often used in snacks for toddlers, and it’s concentrated to such an extent that all that remains is the sugar. In fact, sugar has over 50 different aliases. Sneaky, right? Here are just a few: sucrose, fructose, glucose, dextrose, galactose, lactose, maltose, invert sugar, raw sugar, confectioner's sugar, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, isoglucose, brown rice syrup, barley malt (plus it contains gluten, so double trouble) and malodextrin.

Even those supposed healthy alternatives such as agave nectar, coconut sugar and honey are nothing more than sugar in a nice dress. In fact, they might be even worse for you than sugar, containing high levels of fructose, which places additional strain on the liver.



WATCH *Juices & Smoothies*

It's easy to think that these are healthy options, but one glass of orange juice can contain the equivalent of 5 teaspoons of sugar and none of the fibre to slow its progress into your bloodstream. Fruit laden smoothies do just the same.

SIMPLE *snacks*

Cut up apple or pear with almond butter (unsweetened).

Oatcakes with smoked salmon or mackerel pate.

Small pot of natural yoghurt with pureed fruit (berries, apple, pear, plum)

A handful of mixed nuts and seeds

Hard-boiled egg and a couple of cherry tomatoes

Carrot sticks, red pepper strips, celery, cucumber with hummus

Muffin frittatas (as before).



SUGAR ADDICTION *is real!*

Sugar triggers the brain's pleasure and reward centres - areas in the emotional centres of the brain responsible for the release of the "feel good" neurotransmitter called dopamine. The same brain areas are stimulated by cocaine, nicotine, opiates like heroin and morphine, and alcohol.

In fact, in 2018, a study at Connecticut College found that Oreo cookies were just as addictive as cocaine for lab rats. (I wonder whether the rats eat the filling first, too?)

If you're used to eating a lot of sugar (said without judgement), you might find the first few days of going sugar free tough - but not let that be what stops you trying. It's not uncommon to experience low levels of energy, low mood, or to feel shaky. Persevere. It will be worth it.



SAY *no* TO ARTIFICIAL *sweeteners!*

One of the things I am questioned about most as a nutrition professional and health coach is sugar substitutes. Artificial sweeteners are man-made products that are no better for us than real sugar. And some - notably aspartame and acesulfame-K - have been linked to cancer.

Sugar alcohols like sorbitol are poorly broken down by the body, which just ends up feeding the bad bacteria in the large intestine. And, what you may not know is that artificial sweeteners - and many other 'natural sweeteners' that find their way into so-called healthy food - behave in the body the same way as actual sugar by raising your blood sugar levels.

The very best scenario of all is that you wean yourself off sweeteners of any kind as this helps you appreciate natural sweetness of real food. If you continue to eat sweet things, your taste buds will always want sweet things. It's as simple as that. If you need a sugar fix, find it in real, natural foods.

It's also worth considering phasing out not only sugary foods but checking the labels on convenience foods to see where sugar has been added. If your diet has traditionally been quite high in the white stuff, the first few weeks can be a little tricky as your body (and brain and taste buds) starts to adjust - but bear with it.

TRY *natural* SWEETENERS INSTEAD

Although the ideal scenario would be to wean yourselves off sweet things generally, this can be tough going - at least at first. Natural sweeteners like apple sauce, dates or mashed banana can be helpful.

You'll find these in lots of healthy recipes. They're natural, what's not to like? The riper the banana, the sweeter the taste. And what about salt. Weird, right?

Adding a pinch of salt (preferably sea salt or pink Himalayan salt crystals) can bring out the natural sweetness in your food so you may find you don't need the sugar anyway.

