

GOING SUGAR FREE

For February we're going to break our sugar habit so that we can balance our energy levels and gain some perspective on how amazing food tastes when there's no added sugar.

Added sugar is the worst ingredient in the modern diet. It upsets your metabolism and contributes to other ailments and problems.



Some facts about sugar:

1. Sugar has no essential nutrients. It provides “empty” calories.
2. Before sugar enters the bloodstream, it breaks down into two simple sugars: glucose and fructose. Glucose is already found in our bodies, our bodies produce it. Fructose is not.
3. Our liver metabolizes fructose into glycogen. Too much glycogen can lead to hypoglycemia and/or diabetes.
4. Excess sugar can cause insulin resistance. Insulin is a hormone that regulates the metabolism of carbohydrates and fats and when the cells are resistant to insulin they are unable to use insulin effectively. This can lead to high blood sugar.
5. Excess sugar upsets other hormones, especially the ones that tells us when we are full and satiated.
6. Sugar is addictive because it causes the release of dopamine in the brain.

Empty calories, hormones out of whack, less control over our food choices and harmful effects on our bodies. Whew! Convincing reasons for cutting out that added sugar.

It takes determination and willpower to go a whole month without sugar. At first you will crave some sweetness, whether it's a cookie or a glass of wine, and you might even give in. If this happens to you, don't throw in the towel for the rest of the month! Just get back to it at the next meal.

Try not to wallow in self-criticism. Remember, we are doing this so that we can see how it feels to live with less sugar and soon enough, you won't have those cravings anymore and you'll feel more energetic than you ever did before!

So how are we going to do this?!

My best advice is to not get too hung up on what you can and can't have!

We are aiming to starve the yeast in our body and get off the sugar roller coaster so a safe guide for each day is to aim for 15-25g of sugar, **all naturally occurring!** For example, coconut water has 11g of sugar in one cup. So if you have some in a smoothie, you will have to monitor what you eat for the rest of the day.

Make sense?

Keep it simple, eat less fruit, more veggies, protein and healthy fats.

Your snacks are going to be a lot different this month, but breakfast, lunch and dinner may not need to change much. Eat lots of nourishing soups and roasted veggies and make sure you are getting enough protein, as it is needed to help the cleansing process. So if you are a vegan like me, you need to be generous with the nuts, seeds and leafy greens. If you are a vegetarian, eat lots of kefir, eggs and organic cheese for your healthy fats and proteins. And if you're a meat eater, stick to lean, organic meat (keeping to the 80/20 rule: 80% whole, fresh, organic foods and 20% be common-sense good foods).



Wheat and Flours

White wheat flour has been stripped of its nutrients so once it enters the bloodstream, it spikes the blood sugar in the body which causes a rise in insulin. And even two slices of whole wheat bread will raise the blood sugar higher than 6 teaspoons of table sugar and higher than most candy bars. YIKES!

I am not suggesting that you go gluten-free as well as sugar-free but you will get the best results if you eat fewer breads and flour products (pasta, naan bread, wraps, pizza dough) and definitely stay away from white flour. Always pick organic, whole grain seedy bread and bake with spelt and sprouted wheat flours.



Things we aren't eating this month

- 1. Sugars that we add.** This one is easy as we control it. Here are some things we won't be indulging in:
 - Maple Syrup
 - Honey
 - Agave
 - Sugar (of any kind)
 - Molasses
- 2. Sugars that are added to the foods we eat.** This requires you to read labels to see whether sugar has been added. Here are a few no-no's:
 - Balsamic vinegar
 - Most packaged cereals
 - Almost anything processed
 - Fruit yogurts
 - Almond Milk (except for the unsweetened version)
 - Fruit juices (more on fruit coming up)
- 3. Any type of alcohol:** no wine, no beer, not even vodka. Why no vodka if it doesn't have any sugar in it? This is part of the cleansing process, but it depends on how strict you want to be. If the point of this month is to cleanse and restore vitality to our systems, we need to steer clear of alcohol. I am going the whole month with none and I'm actually looking forward to the break.
- 4. High glycemic fruits.** These fruits are not bad for you and should be added back to your diet after this month, but fruits like mango, pineapple, banana and grapes all have a high glycemic index so let's eliminate them this month. Try eating berries, apples, kiwis and citrus fruits. If you are wondering about a fruit, google "how much sugar in a _____?" If the answer is more than 15 g of sugar, it's off the menu.
- 5. Processed foods.** If it comes in a package, it's off the menu for the month.



Tips for getting the most out of our Sugar-Free February

1. Upon waking drink a large glass of lemon water to flush your system and help you wake up and drink lots of water throughout the day.
2. Breakfast should be a big meal: eat lots of fruit coupled with fiber and protein to help keep you satisfied and full for the morning.
3. Set a goal of eating 80% whole, fresh, organic foods. We know these foods are alkaline-forming, healing foods that restore health and bring out bodies into homeostasis
4. The other 20% of your diet can be common-sense good foods so you don't have to be deprived of your favourite foods as long as they don't contain sugar!
5. In the evening, instead of finding comfort in a glass of wine, try to drinking soothing teas, or get creative with infusing your own water (recipes will be shared later).
6. Practice daily movement (we will be sticking to our workout routine), get adequate sleep, and create space for meditation and "you time."



The herb Stevia

Aspartame and other artificial sweeteners are just not good for us, but have you heard about the herb **stevia**? The stevia plant is a member of the chamomile plant and is 200 times sweeter than sugar. It doesn't spike your blood sugar and supposedly has anti-fungal properties. You can buy it in any health food store and most grocery stores and it is expensive, but a little goes a long way.

I bought stevia the last time I went sugar-free because I thought I would need something to sweeten my tea, but after the first week I forgot all about it! I liked the taste but it isn't very versatile and can't easily be swapped for honey or agave. I still have over half the bottle of it sitting in my cupboard.

To find out more about stevia go to www.stevia.net

Cultured Foods: the cure for your sugar cravings?

Cultured foods came into my life last summer after reading a book by Donna Gates and Linda Schatz called ***The Body Ecology Diet***. Nothing has ever resonated with me as much as the information in this book! I decided to dive right in and I followed the Body Ecology Cleanse for one month (more on my experience later this month). This meant no coffee, beans, flours, rice, sugar, wine, high glycemic fruits and definitely no processed foods. It also meant eating cultured foods every day to restore the gut flora and cleanse the colon.

What really stuck with me was the power of cultured foods, primarily cultured veggies. Here's a short version of what raw cultured veggies foods can do:



1. **Control cravings.** Cultured veggies help take away the cravings for sweets like pastries, bread, pasta and candy. *(I will get deeper into this later in the month)*
2. **Re-establish your inner ecosystem.**
3. **Improve digestion.** The enzymes in raw cultured veggies are little powerhouses that aid in digesting other foods and help eliminate toxins.
4. **Encourage friendly bacteria.** Cultured foods ensure that the gut ecosystem is rich in friendly bacteria. Ideal for pregnant women.
5. **Cleanse the body.** Cultured foods are alkaline so they are cleansing. Eating alkaline foods helps us maintain healthy pH levels which improve digestion, skin tone and mood.

So try adding cultured foods to your diet, especially this month as we go sugar-free. You'll find cultured foods in most grocery stores, and Whole Foods has a great selection. Although cultured foods may seem pricey, they are still cheaper than a bottle of wine and one jar with last you two weeks of daily consumption.

My favourite cultured foods are:

- Sauerkraut.
- Kimchi
- Apple cider vinegar
- Water kefir
- Organic regular kefir *(made from cow's milk but because it's fermented, there is no lactose in it)*
- Coconut kefir *(this is the yummiest and most nourishing choice but I have only found it at Whole Foods. I have made my own from a simple kefir starter kit.)*
- Homemade fermented veggies. I have been making my own and it's easy once you know how. I will be sharing recipes and how-to's later this month.

Keep your calorie intake up

Going sugar-free usually means weight loss. You will naturally lose weight even at a cellular level as stored toxins leave your body. You will also start eating less because without the sugar, your hormones will be more balanced so your body will know when it's full and you will do less emotional eating.

Losing weight is usually good news but it's also important to eat enough protein and healthy fats so that you have the energy you need for your daily activities. You should eat at least four times a day and stick to a ratio of 80% plant-based foods/20% more indulgent foods (like eggs, meat, whole grains breads, healthy oils etc.).

Tips for getting enough protein and healthy fats

1. Instead of putting sweetener in your coffee, try putting coconut oil and a drop of vanilla (*I make my own latte by blending coffee, almond milk, vanilla and coconut oil*).
2. Eat lots of nuts and seeds (*raw is best*).
3. Eat avocados as they are an excellent source of fiber and healthy fat.
4. Eat organic meats and cheeses, within the 80/20 rule.
5. Use healthy oils like olive oil and walnut oil to make your own salad dressings.
6. Add hemp hearts and chia seeds to your breakfasts, smoothies and salads.



Sugar-Free But Still Yummy

Here are some snacks and drinks to get you started.

Vanilla Latte

1 cup of strong, hot, black coffee
 ½ cup unsweetened almond milk
 1tbsp coconut oil
 1tsp vanilla

Make your coffee extra strong and while it is still super hot, put in your Vitamix or powerful blender with the almond milk, coconut oil and vanilla. Blend for 10-15 secs. The results are a smooth, creamy frothy latte!

Chia Pudding

½ cup chia seeds
 1 cup almond milk (or regular milk)
 2 cups of shredded unsweetened coconut
 ½ cup slivered almonds

Place everything inside a mason jar (or a bowl) and refrigerate overnight. The next day, just grab and go! This make a perfect snack as it has protein, healthy fat and fibre.

Berry Smoothie

Since berries are totally allowed, let's make sure we stock up on bags of frozen berries!

1 cup mixed frozen berries
 1 orange peeled
 1 cup almond milk
 1 cup hemp hearts

Blend up and enjoy!



More Sugar-Free Goodness

Green Attack Smoothie

Did you know that green apples contain less sugar than red ones?

- 1 green apple
- 1 large handful of leafy greens (I prefer spinach)
- ½ cucumber
- ½ lime
- ginger to taste
- 1 -2 cups coconut water

Blend and enjoy.

Cashew Hummus

By adding roasted cashews to your hummus you are upping the healthy fats and the proteins. Eat with organic sugar free crackers (Mary's), raw veggies, or in a wrap with avocado, grated carrot, diced cucumber and tomato. Seriously good.

- 1 cup of roasted raw cashews (I do mine on the stove, just be careful not to burn them)
- 1 can organic chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- ½ cup of tahini
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- juice of 1 lemon or 4 tbsps
- salt
- a pinch of red pepper flakes if you like it spicy



Put all ingredients in your food processor or blender and blend until you reach your desired consistency. I like mine on the chunky side so I can spread it on toast.

One Last Recipe

Rice Wraps

These are so easy to whip up on a Sunday (or any day you have time) and stay good in the fridge for a few days. Mine never last more than two because the kids take them for their lunches.

Make more filling than you think you'll need as leftovers can be used in a salad or thrown into a smoothie.

rice wraps (which you can find anywhere now)
4-5 julienned carrots
1 large cucumber cut into thin pieces about 3 inches long
2 red peppers cut up thin and long
1 block of tofu cut thin and long

Follow the directions for the rice wraps (again let me stress how easy it is) and simply wrap up the ingredients. You can play with different fillings: sprouts, cheese, chicken, avocado, etc.

If you want to dip these, I recommend a simple peanut sauce that you make yourself with lime, peanut butter and soy sauce. If you are planning on dipping them, make sure you read the ingredients on the sauce bottle!



Thank You!



Thanks for joining us on our **SUGAR-FREE MONTH**. I hope you find it useful and inspiring.

Rebecca