



I kicked a seriously addictive habit

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 book

SARAH WILSON

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 some 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 granolaholics 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 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 confirmed we're designed, metabolically speaking, to consume about 6-9 teaspoons of sugar a day. And that sugar is sugar, whether it comes as white granules, honey or in a freshly squeezed juice.

I soon met detractors, mostly fellow granolaholics. 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 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 hungry cavemen wandering the savannahs. But now, not so much. Today we're bom-



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

So eat less. Moderation is key, the detractors would re-tort. The problem is, sugar, or fructose, has been shown to be as addictive as cocaine. Moderation is nigh impossible; ask anyone who's battled to eat just 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 eat only the smallest amount of sugar. But this is not our reality. One hundred years ago we ate 1kg 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 even, and I don't obsess about food.

I have an autoimmune disease and many symptoms abated when I quit sugar.

The second thing: quitting sugar is not the big shakeup 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. This makes more sense than any granolaholic 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



FIVE SUGAR TRAPS TO AVOID

These foods are health food shop favourites and are full 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 six 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 and 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.



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BRIEF PANMAC-MEN

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BEATING THE HABIT:
Sarah Wilson, right, and
below left, licking beaters as
a child, and bottom, the
front cover of her book.