

Nicki Waterman

with Martha Roberts

THE
SUGAR
ADDICTS'
DIET

80
SUGAR-FREE
RECIPES



Kick the cravings
in 21 days flat!

SUGAR ADDICTS' DIET See the Pounds Drop Off!

Nicki Waterman

and

MARTHA ROBERTS

H A R P E R
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Introduction: Nicki's Story

As a fitness expert, I am regularly told, 'You're so lucky that you're so slim.' I always think, 'You don't know the half of it!' I may be slim now, but that hasn't always been the case. And even though I work hard to be this way, I used to fight a personal demon every minute of the day - my desire to eat sugar.

It was sugar that made me a chubby child and a chunky teenager. And in my 20s I gained even more weight thanks to my sweet tooth. Two pregnancies in quick succession made my weight problem even worse. My husband (now my ex) loved my spare tyres and discouraged my attempts to lose weight. I tried every diet under the sun, had acupuncture and hypnotherapy, and even resorted to slimming pills to shift the weight. But it didn't go - in fact, it all came back on and more.

DISCOVERING EXERCISE

My saving grace, 18 years ago, was discovering the importance of exercise. An inspirational trainer got me off the powerful prescription drugs I'd grown dependent on. As a result, I lost five stone and decided to spread the word about how weight loss could really improve your life.

But behind the scenes I had developed an unhealthy tactic to keep slim. I'd learned that by exercising in excess, I could still eat the sweets I wanted and maintain a reasonable weight. I'd developed my own eating pattern - one proper meal a day and plenty of sugary foods - to sustain this weight loss. I knew it wasn't healthy but it worked. Maintaining my weight loss, however, was a constant struggle. Although I looked slim, I was still flabby and covered in fat, despite my exercise regime. **I was a 'slim, fat person' - someone with the unhealthy attitudes of an overweight person contained within a slim frame.**

SHOCK DISCOVERY

I could have carried on like this for ever. I looked fine and no one would ever have known about my secret eating habits. But just a year ago, something shocked me into realizing that I had to change my ways. My mother-in-law was in hospital being treated for cancer. One day, when I was visiting her, her specialist came to talk to us about what she should eat when she came out of hospital. I'll never forget his words - 'Do not touch refined sugars - they will kill you.'

Thinking about how much sugar I was consuming on a daily basis made me realize that it could easily be me lying on my deathbed if I didn't drastically mend my ways. **On an average day I'd happily consume at least half a pound of pick 'n' mix (my big weakness), large packets of American hard gums and jelly beans, a packet of biscuits and anything else that came my way (I**

can't believe I'm admitting this to you!)). Putting an end to my sugar addiction wasn't just about me but other people too. I had a responsibility to my two children, husband, brothers and friends. This was the wake-up call I needed to help me tackle my serious sugar addiction head-on. I told all my friends, family and work colleagues that I needed their help and support. I was giving up sugar completely, and that meant no chocolate, biscuits, cakes – or pick 'n' mix.

GETTING STARTED

Like all addicts, my decision to kick my habit wasn't without pain – I endured three weeks of excruciating headaches, something I found almost unbearable but I knew I had to go through. Different addicts have their own preferred method for distracting themselves in moments of weakness. A nicotine addict might chew a pen as a substitute for having a cigarette in their mouth. I knew I needed something to stop me going into the local newsagent to get my sugar kick, so I started boxing lessons with a professional coach. While I was focusing on boxing I wasn't yearning for my next sugar fix.

Every time I ate something, I'd text my best friend so we had a record. I didn't trust myself to write it down honestly. Different people – including friend and nutritionist Amanda Ursell – advised me on what to eat to help get me through my cravings.

DEVisING THE SUGAR ADDICTS' DIET

But before I knew it, I was falling off the wagon. Willpower and exercise alone weren't enough. I soon realized there was no point in just giving up sugar unless my diet was right too. Looking into it, I began to understand that I needed support – both physical and emotional – if my attempts to give up sugar were to succeed. That's when I decided to devise my own sugar addicts' diet. **My aim was to even out my blood sugar levels, which I was told were probably a key part of my cravings. This would ensure I was never hungry (so never tempted by sugar!) and make me more capable of dealing with the inevitable emotions of trying to kick the sugar habit.** To be honest, at first I was a little sceptical that it would make a difference to my life. However, I can honestly say – hand on heart – that the 21-day plan really did work for me.

The weight has fallen off me and so has the body fat. I have achieved this without the need for over-exercising, which is just as bad for your body as doing no exercise at all. It's hard for me to believe that I don't have a weight problem for the first time in my life.

A HEALTH-BOOSTING DIET PLAN

The Sugar Addicts' Diet has had countless benefits besides reducing my weight and body fat. I used to wake up with big dark rings under my eyes, and my skin

had an unhealthy pallor. I put it down to ageing but, since kicking the sugar habit I realize my diet was to blame. In my experience, the old saying 'You are what you eat' is so true. The bags under my eyes have now gone, my eyes look bright, my skin glows with health and my hair is thicker. The sugar highs and lows are a thing of the past, which means I have so much more energy than ever before.

I'm not saying I don't ever have cravings, but I seem to be able to control them a lot better. I control them - they don't control me, as they did in the past. A big part of it has been developing strategies to help me avoid situations in which I might be tempted to slip off the straight and narrow.

A WIDESPREAD ADDICTION

Since I made the decision to tackle my sugar addiction, I've discovered how many 'secret' addicts there are out there. 'And I thought I was the only one like that!' is something I now hear a lot. **Sugar is everywhere and it's hard to avoid it. That's why it can be such a battle to kick your addiction. But I've come a long way, and I want other people to know they can do it too. Like me, you will find you lose excess weight, feel fantastic - and lay the foundations for a longer and healthier life.**

I've been shocked by people's lack of knowledge about the hidden sugars in their diet. There are confusing messages about sugar all around us, whether it's on food labels or in fast-food joints. I have written this book to help sugar addicts like me understand why they crave sugar, and how they can get it out of their system and beat the craving once and for all.

IT'S NOT ALL BAD

A lot of people think that all sugars are bad, but my focus here is on refined sugars. Due to illnesses in my family, I've had the (mis)fortune of spending time with some of the world's leading oncologists. They all say that refined sugars - those found in processed foods, sweets, cereals, bread, etc. - are a real danger. Obesity is just the start of it.

Some people have said that naturally occurring sugars are equally bad; I vehemently disagree. Natural sugars in fruit, for example, are unbleached, unrefined and delicious. Mankind has been eating fruit since the dawn of time. Like everything, it's sensible to eat it in moderation and as part of a balanced diet. While fruit may contain varying quantities of natural sugar, called fructose, most varieties are still reasonably low in calories and come with a whole raft of nutrients that keep us feeling and looking good - including vitamins, minerals and fibre, which can help protect against stroke, heart disease and high blood pressure, and may lower the risk of certain cancers.

A HEALTHY EATING PROGRAMME FOR LIFE

My co-author, Martha Roberts, is an experienced, award-winning health writer with an avid interest in nutrition. She's also one of the few people I know who isn't addicted to sugar.

People often say if you want something done, ask a busy person. Well, it could also be said that if you want to understand how to enjoy non-sugary food, ask a person who's not hooked on it! Together, as a writing team, we represent two opposite sides of the sugar-eating spectrum. We hope to present an unbiased, balanced view of how sugar affects all of our lives.

The Sugar Addicts' Diet is a healthy eating programme for life. It will teach you about sugar so that you understand what it does for you (both good and bad), where it is in your food and how you can have more control over it so that it no longer controls you.

It's really about lifestyle - learning skills for life and changing your ways without too much effort or heartache. And whether you're reading this book because you want to lose weight or you're fed up with being controlled by sugar, we hope it gives you the guidance and support you need to finally kick your sugar habit for good.

Part 1:

The Truth about Sugar Addiction

Are You a Sugar Addict?

For many of us, being told how something can affect our health in the future is a big yawn. We're told smoking can kill us and the sun can age us. Now we're being told that sugar is one of our biggest enemies. It seems everyone's out to get us. But many of us have the philosophy, 'Why deprive yourself now on the off-chance that you will get ill in years to come?'

While eating sugar might not send you to the grave, it can lead to problems such as obesity and related illnesses that can make your life a misery. **Symptoms or conditions linked to eating too much sugar may not be life-threatening but they can certainly threaten your quality of life.** Even the government is now worried about the amount of sugar in our diets and has pledged to put it on its health 'hit list' after salt. And even before you start to suffer from the types of medical condition outlined in [Chapter 4](#), chances are you're already suffering from sugar overload. This can lead to troublesome symptoms that spoil your sense of health and wellbeing.

OUR NATURAL LOVE OF SUGAR

Most of us love sugar. We are biologically driven to enjoy sweetness because it helps us identify foods that are safe to eat rather than poisonous (as bitter foods might suggest). Experiments on 10-day-old babies show that when an adult gives them a dummy dipped in sugar solution, they gurgle and look pleased when they see that adult again. Our desire for sweetness is something we can learn from a very young age - and never forget.

But an extreme love of sugar isn't an inevitability - that's something we can prompt by our actions when selecting foods for our children. Professor Aubrey Sheiham, Professor of Dental Public Health at University College London, has written extensively on sugars and health. He says there's a crucial 'window' for overdeveloping this natural preference for sweetness in children and it becomes apparent when a child is weaning. At this point, they become 'picky' as they learn which foods are likely to be 'safe' and which are likely to be 'harmful'. If this preference is indulged with lots of highly sweet foods, they will generally prefer sweet foods from that point onwards. Professor Sheiham says, 'If you give them lots of sweet food in that window between the ages of two and four, their threshold and their liking for sugar will increase and they'll want more. Equally, if you give them mildly sweet things, like fruit, their threshold will be lower.'

So what can you do if you're an adult with a sweet tooth? It is possible to retrain your sweet tooth so that you lower your sweetness threshold. One former sugar addict, Amila, says, 'My love of chocolate meant that nothing but chocolate could

satisfy my sugar cravings. But I've now weaned myself off it by eating other sweet foods such as fruit, and where I used to eat bars of chocolate at a time to get the sweetness I needed, I now find that just one piece of chocolate is sweet enough for me. It really has been a case of "retraining" my palate. If you'd told me before that you could do this, I'd never have believed you!' As you'll see as you read through this book, stabilizing your blood-sugar levels through a proper diet, and finding sweetness in new places such as fruit, can help you retrain your own palate. This also has implications for preventing your children from loving sugar too much (see [Chapters 5 and 6](#)).

WHAT IS SUGAR ADDICTION?

If you simply love sugar, does it mean you have a sugar addiction? Doesn't it just mean you really enjoy the sugar taste and experience? It's when enjoyment turns to compulsion - a need - that we begin to get into the realms of addiction. An addiction is:

- an intense desire for a substance, a desire so severe it disrupts normal life
- very difficult to stop
- something that prompts a severe physiological (bodily) response upon stopping

People who are addicted to something experience a loss of control over their behaviour. They use a substance repetitively and compulsively, despite knowing it might have undesirable consequences. Some experts say that, unlike cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs, there is still insufficient scientific proof that physical addiction to sugar truly exists.

But many people say that their own overwhelming desire to eat sugar is proof enough. Some studies have also suggested that addiction to sugar can be demonstrated. In 2002, a psychologist at Princeton University showed in experiments that rats not only eat sugar excessively, but they suffer from withdrawal when denied it and continue to crave it weeks later. However, as we'll see in [Chapter 2](#), other experts suggest our desire for sugar (or, as they suggest, sugary, fatty foods) is more emotional than physical.

Whatever it is, there are lots of you out there who can't get through the day without thinking about sugar - and probably eating it in excess, too. We don't claim to be able to sort out the emotional side of why you want to eat sugar. That may be based on years of learning and habit, and addressing it may require soul-searching and even professional help. However, by focusing on sugar 'dealers' in [Chapter 12](#), we hope to help you see that there could be emotional trigger points to your desire for sugar. In combination with our 21-day plan, this will help you start to feel on a more even keel, physically and emotionally, when it comes to your desire to eat sugar.

Nicki's Personal Addiction

My sugar addiction was with me all the time. Sugar was an obsession - the

desire for it, how I was going to get it and how long it would be before I could taste it. I just wasn't satisfied until I knew I could have that fix. Even a five-course meal wouldn't satisfy the yearning for sugar. It's as if there was a 'good' voice and a 'bad' voice inside my head. The good voice told me, 'You shouldn't be eating the sugar and should choose something else instead'. The bad voice said, 'Go on - go for it! You know you want to...' I felt out of control, as if sugar had cast a spell on me and I was powerless to do anything against it.

What Other People Say about their Sugar Addiction

As soon as we told people we were writing a book about sugar addiction, they said, 'That's ME!' Everyone we mentioned it to said they had a problem with sugar cravings. Before we started out, we thought we'd strike a chord but we didn't realize it would be to this extent. Here are some of the things they say about their love of sugar:

'I have to have it in the house or I don't feel secure.'

'Even after a huge meal I have to have two sweets to be truly satisfied.'

'I've loved sugar ever since I was a child.'

'I'll ask to see the dessert menu before I order anything else - I often build the entire meal around the dessert.'

'If I eat too much sugar I feel drained of energy, I struggle to open my eyes and I sleep more.'

'Too much sugar and I feel like I have a hangover.'

Polly's Story

I've been hooked on sugar since childhood. Sugar is a device I use to make me feel happy. But as well as giving me pleasure, I abuse it. Some days I really try and get myself in check. I think, 'How can I let sugar rule my life?' But it's so powerful I sometimes feel it's no different to someone who is on heroin.

Sugar Addiction: the Symptoms

Losing control over your behaviour when sugar is around, eating it repetitively and compulsively, problems stopping its use - already this may sound familiar to you. But to give you further guidance, listed below are physical and emotional symptoms experienced by many people who say they can't live without sugar. As we'll see in later chapters, addiction is often linked to the emotions sugar stirs up in you. But it's also about what it does to you physically.

The symptoms listed here are typical of imbalances in blood sugar levels. They also reflect a diet low in nutrients and high in sugars and refined carbohydrates. Poor eating habits, such as not eating regularly enough, make matters worse. The Sugar Addicts' Diet addresses all these imbalances to help reduce such symptoms.

As you read through these lists, you may recognize some - or even all - of these symptoms. However, even people who have none of these symptoms will find the Sugar Addicts' Diet a sensible, healthy, balanced eating plan that will help them maintain good health and prevent these symptoms taking hold.

Physical Symptoms

- Trouble controlling your weight
- Restlessness followed by a slump
- Lack of energy
- Trouble concentrating
- Dizziness and/or visual disturbances
- Headaches
- Tiredness and drowsiness, especially during the day
- Insomnia
- Cravings
- PMS
- Any of the conditions defined in [Chapter 4](#)

Emotional Symptoms

- Irritable and easily stressed
- Frustration and anxiety
- Mood swings
- Miserable, even tearful
- Nervousness
- Never feeling fully satisfied with food
- Euphoria when you first eat sugar
- Lying about how much sugar you eat
- Taking extreme measures to get sugar (e.g. midnight visit to the shops)
- Confusion about what to do to feel better

You may well have gone through the lists saying, 'That's me!' To confirm that you have a problem with sugar, take a look at the checklist below. Some people who crave sugar, like Nicki, describe the following:

Checklist: Are You a Sugar Addict?

Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following statements:

- **You think about sugary foods more than any other types of food.**

YES/NO

Nicki says, 'Every minute of the day, from the moment I woke up to the moment I went to bed, I'd think about sweet food, whether it was sweets, chocolate, biscuit

or cakes. I'd even wake in the middle of the night thinking of it.'

• **You've attempted to cut down on sweet food in your diet before. YES/NO**

Nicki says, 'I've lost count of the number of times I've said, "Right, that's it - from today I'm giving up sugary foods" and succeeded for a couple of days, only to be drawn back in by blinding headaches, grumpiness and sheer desire for sugar.'

• **You find yourself eating more and more sugar as time goes by. YES/NO**

Nicki says, 'I ate a lot of sugar as a child and somehow managed to kid myself that I didn't eat as much as an adult, but I definitely did. Back then it was a treat - as an adult you can make it part of your everyday life and no one will question you.'

• **You lie about how much sugary food you eat. YES/NO**

Nicki says, 'I've lied so many times to friends, family and colleagues about how much sugar I've eaten. There's direct lying, like "I haven't eaten any sugar today when I have, and indirect lying where I haven't corrected people when they assume I never waver from a healthy diet.'

• **If you miss out on regular sugar, you feel terrible. YES/NO**

Nicki says, 'If I didn't eat sugar regularly enough, I was like a monster - irritable, grumpy, headachy and unable to sit still. It was as if I'd been possessed and the only thing that would put it right was a sugar fix.'

• **You've altered your routine to get sweet foods. YES/NO**

Nicki says, 'When I needed sugar and didn't have the right foods in the house, I'd make special arrangements to get it, whether it was leaving home half an hour early to ensure I could stop for it or ringing friends and asking them to pick it up on the way to see me.'

• **The thought of getting sugar makes you focused and tunnel-visioned. YES/NO**

Nicki says, 'I know all the newsagents near me that sell pick 'n' mix - and I used to use them as landmarks. If I knew I was going near one and had the opportunity for a "fix", it was as if my senses were on red alert and my concentration was at its peak.'

• **You've experienced what feels like a sugar 'hangover'. YES/NO**

Nicki says, 'I've had some memorable alcohol hangovers in my time but my worst hangovers have definitely been after sugar binges. I felt nauseous, headachy and struggled to get out of bed.'

• **You often feel sugar is ruling you. YES/NO**

Nicki says, 'Anyone who doesn't have a thing about sugar probably thinks it's strange to say this, but it really can feel as though sugar is controlling your life, from your hunger levels and taste buds through to your emotions. My idea of freedom is being able to say "no" to sugar without a second thought.'

• **You often binge on sweet foods or white-flour foods such as biscuits or cakes. YES/NO**

Nicki says, 'I've lost count of the number of times I've binged on biscuits, freshly toasted white bread, pick 'n' mix or cakes. When you love sugar, it becomes an intrinsic part of your life.'

If you've said 'yes' to two or more of these, you have a problem with sugar. Don't

worry – we’re going to try and help you. Even if this isn’t you, this book will still be of interest, not least in helping you to understand the behaviour of others around you – perhaps friends or relatives who struggle with weight issues or ill health and don’t even realize that sugar could be to blame.

SUGAR IS EVERYWHERE

Picture it – you wake up in the morning and have a bowl of cereal and a cup of tea. You’ll already have eaten more than 8 grams of sugar if you’ve had a bowl of cornflakes – make that 44 grams if it’s a bowl of Frosties. And that’s before you’ve sprinkled sugar on top of your cereal and put two spoons of it in your tea.

As a nation we’re eating more sugar than ever before. The average Briton eats 16 times more sugar today than 100 years ago. In 1900, people ate an average of 4 pounds (around 1.5 kilos) of sugar a year – the equivalent of around a bag and a half of sugar. Today, according to the UK’s National Diet and Nutrition Survey, that figure is 65 pounds or just over 24 kilos – the equivalent of 24 bags of sugar every year. That’s around 65 grams – 13 teaspoons – a day. In the US, added sugar can comprise as much as a quarter of a person’s daily food intake.

You might think, ‘But I don’t even buy that many bags of sugar in a year.’ True, you probably don’t. That’s because the figure comes not just from the sugar we actively put in our food, by sprinkling it on cereal or spooning it into tea and coffee. It also includes the ‘hidden’ sugar that’s so often put into our food at the manufacturing stage, and which we may not even understand we’re consuming. Food manufacturers are being increasingly pressurized by parents, campaign groups, politicians and health experts to reduce levels of sugar, fat and salt in certain foods and to call a halt to advertising foods to children (an issue we look into in [Chapter 5](#)). The Food and Drink Federation, which represents food manufacturers, announced that super-size chocolate snacks are due to be axed to help in the battle against obesity, which is a step in the right direction. But in the meantime, the onus is on us to be vigilant and look out for sugar for ourselves.

How Much Sugar Should We Eat?

The UK government and the World Health Organization recommend that starchy carbohydrates such as bread, rice and pasta should constitute 55–75 per cent of our daily food intake. Free sugars or ‘non-milk extrinsic sugars’ – sugar added by us or, more significantly, by the manufacturer – should comprise 10 per cent or less. In other words, no more than one-tenth of our daily calories should come from added sugar.

If the average woman’s recommended daily calorie intake is 1,940 (less if you are overweight and want to shift some pounds), that means no more than 194 calories should come from added sugar. But, as we have seen, the average Briton is already on 65 grams, or a huge 260 calories, of these added sugars per day, 30 per cent more than the recommended maximum. A can of cola contains just over

10 teaspoons of sugar (200 calories) so you can see how easy it is to go over the advised amount. ~~Have a think about how many cans of soft drink, biscuits, cakes, sweets and bowls of cereal you eat in any one day and you'll probably find this is way more than one-tenth of the food you eat, and far in excess of 10 teaspoons of sugar.~~

Nicki's Tip

Want to work out how much sugar there is in a food? Take a look at the label. Where it says 'carbohydrates', it generally says 'of which sugars - Xg'. A teaspoon of sugar is around 5g so divide X by 5 to find out how many teaspoons of sugar it contains. So if it says 'of which sugars - 15g', divide 15 by 5 and you'll know it contains 3 teaspoons.

THE SUGAR CONTENT OF FOODS

Food	Rounded Teaspoons of Extrinsic (Added) Sugar
1 digestive biscuit	1/2
1 chocolate digestive	1
1 slice (45g) of jam-filled sponge cake	4
Mars Bar	7
1 milk chocolate bar (50g)	5 1/2
1 scoop of ice cream	1 1/2
1 bowl of cornflakes	1/2
1 teaspoon of jam	3/4
Half a tin (200ml) of cream of tomato soup	1
Half a tin of baked beans	2 1/2
1 glass of Lucozade	6
1 glass of Ribena	4
1 tablespoon of tomato ketchup	1
1 tablespoon of sweet pickle	1
1 tablespoon of salad cream	1/2
1 can (300ml) of cola	7

Where Sugar is 'Hiding'

Even people whose diet consists mainly of savoury rather than sweet foods are probably eating more sugar than they realize, especially if they are fans of processed foods such as ready meals. **The last thing you expect to find in a savoury ready meal is sugar, right? Wrong! They can contain up to 20 per cent sugar.** And what about the sugar found in a dollop of tomato ketchup?

Remember: even so-called 'low-fat' foods can be high in sugar.

The problem is that sugar is often added to foods where you'd never expect to find it. Would you, in a million years, ever imagine that there's sugar in some sandwich meats or certain varieties of cottage cheese? For further jaw-dropping revelations about where you're likely to find sugar when you least expect it, see [Chapter 7](#).

If you really want to avoid sugar, you have to learn how to decipher labels and get to the root of what you're being fed. Sometimes it can feel like you're reading another language! In later chapters, we'll show you how to be a label 'detective' and work out for yourself if a food contains sugar, even if it looks like it shouldn't.

DOES OUR LOVE OF SUGAR REALLY MATTER?

Does it really matter that we're eating so much sugar? It tastes great and it makes us feel happy and content. Many of us would say there's no high that compares to the buzz of eating sugar. But the satisfaction comes at a price.

If you have a major love affair with sugar, chances are you're also having major problems with your weight. Later (see [Chapter 3](#)), we'll be explaining that sugar is a carbohydrate and that some carbohydrates in the diet are good. Chosen properly, they can actually help you maintain a steady weight and improve your health. We will also see that some sugars are preferable to others. But at the moment, all you need to know is that, by and large, sugar added to the diet is bad and is one of the main reasons we're now fatter than ever before.

As you'll see in [Chapter 4](#), there is also a huge range of health problems that are either brought on or exacerbated by eating too much sugar. For every medical study that suggests sugar is good for you (and these are generally funded by the immensely powerful sugar industry), there are dozens more that warn of the negative impact of high-sugar diets that are now so familiar to us.

How This Book Can Help

So you're a sugar addict. Perhaps, after doing the questionnaire in [Chapter 1](#), you've admitted this to yourself for the first time. That's an amazing first step – realizing you have an issue with sugar is a huge leap forward because it means you're now in a position to do something about it.

There are lots of self-help books about addiction, habits, cravings and, specifically, sugar. We should know – we've read them all. But we found most of them so difficult to read and understand that you could be forgiven for reaching for the sugar as a reward! This book intends to give you all this help and more in an uncomplicated way. The plan is based on Nicki's success at beating her sugar addiction, following her lifelong struggle with it. She says, 'When I decided to deal with my sugar addiction, I was faced with lots of conflicting messages about it – take this supplement, don't eat this, increase the amount of that. It was a nightmare. Having done it all and been through hell and back, I now feel I can share with you what works and what doesn't. You all know what sugar means to me, and if I can manage to kick the habit by following this plan, then so can you.'

OUR PHILOSOPHY

The aim of this book is to get you on the road to making the right food choices and eating regularly to help break the sugar habit and lose weight. Sounds simple, but so many of us with sugar addictions don't do this. By making these two things a habit, you can help to ensure you never feel that roaring hunger that so often accompanies diets. As a result, you should – like Nicki – start to feel more physically and emotionally balanced as your body responds to the good things you're feeding it and your need for sugar reduces. Stick with this and you'll eventually be at the stage where you can allow yourself a sugary treat (come on – we're all human!) and it won't draw you back into your old ways. Plus, you'll be losing weight without tedious calorie-counting. How's that for an incentive!

HOW THE DIET WORKS

We'll be going into a lot more detail about the right food choices, but here they are in a nutshell:

- **Avoid 'obvious' sugars and 'sneaky' sugars:** This will help prevent sugar 'highs and lows'.
- **Eat good-quality complex carbohydrates, protein and fibre together:** This will stop you feeling hungry. Fibre (in complex carbohydrates or vegetables) helps to slow down the rate at which glucose is broken down in the body, thus

helping to prevent sugar peaks and dips.

- **Include plenty of 'good' fats in the diet:** Omega 3 and 6 oils from fish, nuts and seeds boost carbohydrate metabolism, helping to burn carbohydrate calories more quickly.
- **Eat regularly and have good quality snacks:** Regular meals and snacking on the right foods will help to keep blood-sugar levels even through the day and prevent you bingeing.

The diet has worked a treat for many sugar addicts. Even those who didn't think they had poor blood-sugar control have found it's worked for them - this is an eating plan that can be used by just about anyone. As it's based on the principles of healthy eating and cutting out added sugars and refined carbohydrates, it's also suitable for diabetics. But if you have diabetes, always talk to your GP or specialist before changing your eating programme.

Polly's Story

Before I sorted out my blood sugar, I'd get the shakes and would have to have sugar. If I got hungry, I'd lose the plot. By learning to eat properly - protein with carbohydrate - and have good, regular snacks, I've really helped to level things out. Now if I have sweet things, it's because I want them rather than need them, as I used to.

How the Diet Can Help You

So how are we going to help you? What we aren't going to do is preach - there's nothing worse than some faceless person telling you what you can't eat or can't do. This is Nicki's story of how she got her sugar addiction under control and lost weight in the process - a true double-whammy! As you go through the book in your own efforts to get sugar back on your terms, Nicki will be with you all the way, giving you her tips, support and encouragement.

You probably don't associate the word 'diet' with fun, but we're going to show you that it doesn't necessarily have to mean 'punishment' either. By sorting out your relationship with sugar, you'll feel better physically and emotionally, not held to ransom by your love of it.

You're no doubt feeling bad about your love of sugar and won't want us to make you feel any worse. But early on we're going to tell you about how sugar can affect your health. First, because it's true, and second, because it could be the extra 'nudge' you need to make you address your problem once and for all. As you saw in the introduction, this is what happened to Nicki.

There may be times when you feel like giving up the diet. But before you do, remember this - Nicki was like you, wanting sugar all the time and feeling it controlled her life. She was also, believe it or not, carrying extra pounds that she couldn't shift. She managed to lose this extra weight simply by eating the Sugar Addicts' Diet way. She knows this is the formula for success, and she wants to share it with you.

Nicki's Tips

Throughout the book, Nicki will be offering her tips on how she kicked her sugar habit, from coping with those difficult 'no sugar' moments through to positive messages that have worked for her. Some might work for you, some might not - the important thing is to use these tips either as tools or simply inspiration to find your own methods for getting a grip on your sugar cravings. And if you find your own tips, tell us - we'd love to hear about them so we can pass them on.

What You Need

Keep a pen or pencil with you because you'll need it to write your diary. Keeping a food diary is a crucial part of the plan - there is a template in the book for you to copy and fill in yourself (as well as a version filled in by Nicki to show you how to do it).

You can record all kinds of information in your food diary, from how sugar is making you feel and who your sugar 'dealers' are to the names of sugar-free foods you may hear someone mention on television. Don't worry - it won't be like going back to school! And believe us, it's not a waste of time. Nicki says, 'Being able to write things down was a vital part of my recovery programme. There's so much going on in your head when you're beating an addiction you really need that outlet. It also helps you to be true to yourself - it's so easy to lie about what you've been eating, but if you have to write it down, somehow it's different.'

Why We Crave Sugar

In the past, not a minute would go by without Nicki thinking about sugar. But why did she crave it? And why is it that you are so desperate for it? In Nicki's experience, her sugar addiction was made up of two parts – **physical** and **emotional**.

The physical was about the 'hit' and energy rush she got from sugar, while the emotional was about the role sugar played in terms of making her feel happy and comfortable. When she decided to tackle her addiction, she realized she was going to have to take a good look at both aspects if she was to succeed.

In helping you overcome your addiction in the same way, we can't just say to you, 'Stop eating sweets' or 'Chuck that chocolate in the bin'. That won't be the answer – it wasn't for Nicki. We need to explain to you what sugar is, where it is found in food and how it affects you physically. We'll also be looking at the emotional side of sugar, how it can be more than just a taste sensation but also a friend, comforter and reward. We explain that while the 'feel-good' factor from sugar is an emotion, there are physical factors to take into account, too, such as how sugar affects blood-sugar levels. In other words, **if you're hooked on sugar, it's not a case of 'lack of willpower'. There's a powerful combination of emotional and chemical activity inside you that's hard to beat!**

Bear with us through the explanation of what sugar is. It might sound complicated but it's crucial to your understanding of what it's doing when you eat it. It will also start to give you an insight into how you're going to beat it.

THE PHYSICAL ADDICTION

What is Sugar?

Sugar is what's known as a carbohydrate. Carbohydrates are fuel for the body and, as our bodies can't make them, we have to get them from our food. Compared to fats and protein, they are also the quickest-acting form of energy we can get.

The carbohydrates we eat come in two main varieties – simple and complex.

Simple Carbohydrates

These are what we most commonly refer to as sugars, or simple sugars. If you were to look at them under a microscope, you'd see that they are quite small, short units. Because of this, they are easily and quickly absorbed by the stomach or small intestine. You'll recognize their scientific names because they end in '-'

ose', such as glucose and fructose.

Complex Carbohydrates

These are generally longer units - in fact, they are simple sugars strung together. Before they can be used by the body, they have to be broken down into smaller, simple units - a process that takes both time and energy.

In order to be used by the body, all carbohydrates are eventually broken down into glucose. We can see from this that glucose (a sugar) isn't bad - in fact, it's essential for life. The brain and nervous system need glucose to function. But we get the glucose we need from the breakdown of vegetables, fruits and grains without adding any extra. Also, if the production of glucose from the food is slow because the body has to break it down - as it does with 'brown', complex carbohydrates - this helps to regulate the amount of glucose in the blood. If, on the other hand, the breakdown is quick, this can lead to high amounts of glucose in the blood followed by a corresponding dip - poor blood-sugar control. And some carbohydrates cause this to happen more quickly than others. Simple carbohydrates get converted to glucose very quickly (if they aren't already glucose itself) while complex carbohydrates are absorbed into the bloodstream slowly, helping to avoid these blood-sugar imbalances. For further information about blood-sugar, see ['The Sugar Roller Coaster'](#).

Stop! You're probably thinking that all complex carbohydrates must be good for you because your body has to work to break them down. That's not the case - some are far better than others. Complex carbohydrates come in two varieties - unrefined and refined.

UNREFINED CARBOHYDRATES

These are eaten pretty much as nature made them. Examples of unrefined complex carbohydrates are whole grains used in whole-grain bread, or brown rice complete with its husks. These release energy slowly in the body. With unrefined complex carbohydrates, the fibre - made up of glucose molecules strung together - cannot be broken down or digested, and as a result helps to slow down the speed at which the rest of the carbohydrate breaks down in the body.

REFINED CARBOHYDRATES

These are essentially 'sneaky' sugars that have been processed to extend their shelf-life and make them desirable to us shoppers. But in the process they've lost many of the nutrients that made them beneficial in the first place. These refined carbs are often lacking in essential minerals and vitamins. Importantly, they have also had their fibre - such as cellulose or pectin - taken away. It's this fibre that can help to slow down a carbohydrate's breakdown into glucose, which in turn helps to regulate blood-sugar levels. The fact that they can be broken down so quickly after being eaten means these refined carbs are essentially just like simple

sugars. But because so many of us don't know the effect they have on the body, they are hidden or 'sneaky' sugars.

As you'll see in [Chapter 8](#), we'll be telling you about which foods you should eat to help stabilize blood sugar and minimize your sweet cravings. The carbohydrates we recommend are unrefined - refined carbs are a definite no-no.

THE SUGAR 'ROLLER COASTER'

When we eat simple or 'sneaky' sugars, they go straight into the blood. This huge 'hit' of sugar causes the body to flood the bloodstream with the sugar-control hormone, insulin, to try and regulate sugar levels. The trouble is that the body isn't designed for such high sugar levels - the most sugar our caveman ancestors would have got was from berries picked off bushes, not chocolate bars or jelly babies! Excessive amounts of insulin end up being released to deal with the sugar either by removing it from the blood or taking it to the muscles.

Imagine a roller coaster which starts off at a low level, climbing to a high peak before dropping down into a dip. It's the same principle when you eat sugar. You start off with low amounts of sugar in the blood (the roller coaster dips), eat lots of sugar (the roller coaster rises), then insulin is produced to flush the excess sugar out, dropping sugar levels back down (the roller coaster dips again).

'So what?' you might think. Well, eating sugar - where the roller coaster peaks and the rise in blood-sugar levels may make you feel high, happy and even euphoric. After all, that's one of the reasons sugar is so attractive. But the point at which the roller coaster falls - the 'sugar dip' - can leave you feeling tired, ratty and even depressed. As well as increasing your risk of certain illnesses (see [Chapter 4](#)) and putting on weight, it's this dip that can make you want to eat more sugar to get that roller coaster back on a high again. **If you don't break your sugar-eating habits, you're essentially destined for life on a sugar roller coaster that you're not allowed to get off.** Life on this roller coaster is a crucial part of sugar addiction.

Which Foods Fuel the Roller Coaster?

Simple sugars are perfect fuel for this blood-sugar roller coaster, as are the 'sneaky' sugars - the refined carbohydrates. The extent to which specific carbohydrates (including 'good' unrefined complex carbohydrates) make the roller coaster rise - and the speed at which they do so - depends on something called the Glycaemic Index (GI). The GI is a way of measuring the effects of food on blood-sugar levels. Foods range from high GI down to low GI.

High GI foods break down quickly during digestion and raise blood-sugar levels rapidly and to high levels. Examples include white rice (not basmati) and white bread.

Mid GI foods break down moderately slowly. Examples include pasta and raisins.

Low GI foods break down slowly and release sugar gradually into the bloodstream for long-term energy. Examples include lentils, sweet potatoes, and

fruits such as cherries and peaches.

In simple terms, if you want to stop the roller coaster – or at least stop it rising and falling so sharply – you should be trying to eat low GI foods rather than high GI ones. But don't start panicking and trying to work out what the GI rating of foods is. The Sugar Addicts' Diet incorporates these principles for you so foods we suggest you eat will tend to be low or medium GI, and those we advise cutting down on or removing altogether will tend to be high GI. We'll be providing you with lists of these foods later on, as well as a meal planner and recipes.

Nicki's Physical Addiction

'When I had a bag of sweets in front of me, I'd have that physical "rush" you get when something really exciting is about to happen to you. And when I ate them, they never disappointed. I'd get an intense, overwhelming rush of energy, taking me to a real high. I've never taken drugs but I often wonder if it's a similar feeling. The trouble was that I'd have to keep on eating the sweets to get that high feeling. In my world, there was no such thing as eating just one pink shrimp. I had to eat the lot. It was like being on a confectionery conveyor belt where the sweets kept coming and I kept eating. I never felt sick or reached "saturation point", which really added to the problem. If I'd felt ill, I might have been inclined to stop! But of course I had to stop eventually, not because willpower kicked in but because the sweets ran out and there was nothing more to binge on. When I saw the bottom of the bag, I'd feel really sad and deflated. After my sugar "high" it was like payback time – I'd have low energy and would start feeling weary. Other people picked up on it, too. They'd say, "What's the matter with you?"'

THE EMOTIONAL ADDICTION

As we've seen, a large part of sugar addiction is down to what sugar does when it gets into your body. Being on the sugar roller coaster means we feel terrible if we don't have sugar because of the dip that inevitably follows our sugar hit. Not surprisingly, many of us reach for sugar to lift us out of that trough and get us on a high again. However, the part that sugar plays in making us feel certain emotions such as happiness or relief is also central to addiction. Perhaps you were given sweets as a child as a reward for being good, or maybe you raided the kitchen cupboard for biscuits after being told off. Whatever it is, it's very likely you'll have associations with sugar that go back to when you were younger.

What the Experts Say

'It's more Emotional than Physical'

Marie Reid, Professor of Nutritional Psychology at the University of Surrey, Roehampton, has written widely on sugar addiction. She says studies have failed to prove that sugary foods lead to physiological addiction, such as you can get with alcohol or drugs. Rather, it's down to people making associations with

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