

By Rebecca Newman

A LITTLE OF WHAT YOU FANCY...

Cut back on sugar without driving yourself crazy

Hallelujah! We've made it to the end of abstemious January: time to shrug off the hair shirt. But pause a second. Before we sashay out for mojitos, is it worth considering a middle way? A way that is tenable; which celebrates (the odd) chocolate pudding, but is better for our energy, health, sex lives – even our figures. Maybe a slimmer-middle way?

The noise around the evils of sugar, this year's diet demon, has been deafening. But the truth is that we're eating more sugar than we did, and more than is good for us.

Here is a summary of the issues, and a non-faddist, no-nonsense path to less sugary eating, with advice from nutritionists Hannah Richards, of the holistic mind and body studio movethreesixty.com, and Amelia Freer, based at members' club Grace Belgravia and at freernutrition.com.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

'Sugar depletes insulin and can lead to diabetes,' says Hannah. 'It dehydrates the body and causes yeast and parasite cultures in the gut. Cancer loves sugar.'

Beyond that it knackers you out: the hit of sugar from a doughnut triggers a release of insulin so the hormone can remove excess sugar from the blood; if it takes out too much, you have a blood sugar low that leaves you tired and moody – and reaching for more sugar.

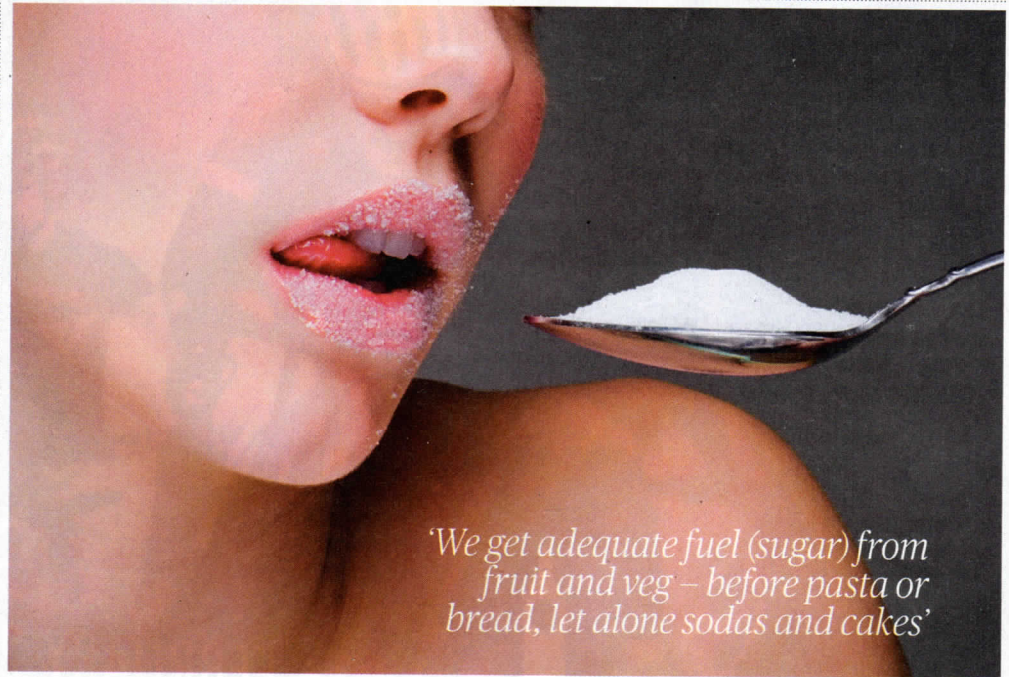
Sugar also causes your face to sag: in a process called glycation, sugar molecules attach themselves to cells in your body, making them gluey and inefficient. The molecules are particularly attracted to collagen and elastin, the proteins that make your skin plump and youthful; with the sugar coating they become brittle and prone to breaking, which means your frown or smile lines stay, rather than smoothing themselves away.

In short: excessive sugar makes you fat, wrinkly and unwell.

BUT I HARDLY EAT ANY SUGAR...

Sadly, not so. 'Wake up!' says Hannah. 'All carbohydrates convert to sugar.' Where the World Health Organisation recommends eating no more than 10 teaspoons a day, a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice may contain 8 teaspoons.

'Our bodies simply weren't



'We get adequate fuel (sugar) from fruit and veg – before pasta or bread, let alone sodas and cakes'

MEAL PLAN

Amelia's low-sugar alternatives

BREAKFAST

Spinach, tomato and mushroom omelette



*Chia seeds soaked in milk
Chicken breast with vegetables*

LUNCH

*Chicken and vegetable soup
Smoked salmon and salad
Chickpea salad
Plus one portion of fruit*



DINNER

*Chicken/prawn/lentil and vegetable curry
Steak and salad
Baked fish and vegetables with lots of herbs and lemon
Chicken/fish/meat/bean and vegetable stir-fry
Plus one portion of fruit or Amelia's chocolate chia pudding (recipe is in her ebook, out next month)*



designed to cope with the amount of sugar in today's diets,' says Amelia. 'We get adequate fuel (sugar) from fruit and vegetables – before pasta or bread, let alone sodas and cakes.' In short: unless it's protein, it breaks down to sugar.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

Hannah Richards:

- 1 Pick your poison. If you love alcohol, have it, but limit the days you drink it.
- 2 Where possible, eat food that your ancestors ate – things that were alive, were pulled off a tree or dug up from the ground – as little messed around with as possible.
- 3 If anything has ingredients that don't sound like food, don't eat it.

Amelia Freer:

- 1 Buy fewer ready-made products and prepare more meals: dressings, tinned foods, cereals, marinated fish and meat, ketchups, jams and sushi may contain hidden sugars.
- 2 Combine food that breaks down to sugar with protein and fats to prevent the metabolic peak and crash: for example, eat fruit in moderation and always with protein (don't snack on it, juice lots of it or buy pre-made juices).
- 3 Be careful of 'health' products claiming to be low-fat and gluten-free as they often contain added sugar.

In short: remember the joys of eating (home-cooked) meat and two (preferably leafy green) veg.

EASY WAYS TO DO IT

Substitute...

- Shop-bought dressing with olive oil and lemon.
- Cereal or granola with oats (with chia seeds, almond milk, protein powder).
- Fizzy drinks with hot water and lemon, herbal tea or water.
- Fruit smoothie with spinach and kale juice, or a small amount of low-GI fruit such as pear.
- Bought cakes with homemade cakes.
- Milk chocolate with 85 per cent dark chocolate or, in cooking, cacao nibs.
- Low-fat flavoured yoghurt with full-fat yoghurt with toasted hazelnuts and pistachios, or coconut milk yoghurt.
- Muesli bar with Bounce natural energy ball, LoveRaw bar, or apple slices with nut butter.
- Mango and bananas with berries such as blueberries and blackberries.
- Sugar with cinnamon, an excellent substitute that can help to keep blood sugar levels stable.
- Wine or cocktails with vodka, sparkling water and fresh lime; even better, vodka on the rocks or tequila.

