TAKE THE 28-DAY NO SUGAR CHALLENGE
The goal? Stay away from all processed and refined sugar for 28 days!

GUIDELINES

What to eat

No processed/refined/added sugars.
• No cakes, biscuits, sweets, fizzy pops, etc.
• Watch out for processed/pre-made foods as well: even things you don’t think of as sweet (spaghetti sauce, canned soups, “healthy” cereals) often have added sugars. Read the labels and look out for alternate names for sweeteners.

No fizzy drinks or soft drinks
• I’m repeating this one because it can be one of the hardest things to kick! Just don’t even go there. Try water with a slice of frozen fruit or cucumbers instead.

Fruit and other natural/minimally refined sugars are okay.
• We recommend staying away from fruit drinks and fruit juices. Without the fibre that comes with the whole fruit, the sugar in fruit juices can really spike your blood sugar. If you’re a juice drinker, try smoothies instead for the month. As long as you’re blending the whole fruit, you’re still getting the positive benefits of the fiber to slow digestion and help keep your blood sugar stable.

If you want to be stricter than just the white stuff, go for it! However, we recommend starting with just refined sugar and going from there.
• Set yourself up for success: if you try to do too much at once, it’s easier to get overwhelmed and give up. Remember that you can always do more later—start with refined sugar for 28 days and use the momentum of your success to challenge yourself further next month.

Eat a rainbow! See how many different colors you can get on your plate throughout the day (from real, natural foods, not food dyes : ).

How to prepare

Clean out the pantry
• Get ready by clearing as much sugar and sugary foods out of the house as you can. You’re feeling strong now, but you’ll face cravings eventually. Creating a buffer from temptation (the difference between needing to drive to the store and just opening the fridge to get what you want) will give you enough time to let cravings subside.
• Unopened foods can be given to a local food bank.
• If you have open packages that for some reason you just can’t bear to toss, give them away to friends or coworkers (though we’d rather see you encourage them to join the challenge with you!).

Plan ahead
• Replace all the foods you’ve jettisoned with fresh, healthy snacks
• Have a meal plan. Once you’ve realized what you need to cut out for this challenge, you may be wondering what you’re going to eat. Having a plan in place for all your meals, at least for the first week, will make it easier to avoid falling into old, easy habits as soon as life gets crazy.
• You can find entire months of no-sugar meal plans online: they don’t have to be as elaborate as this one, but they offer plenty of good ideas and inspiration.
• Don’t forget to think about snacks, too! One of my favorite tricks is to keep a bag of almonds in the car for days I get trapped out and about and forget to bring a snack along.
SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS

Slip-ups are okay
• We’re all likely to make mistakes or decisions we regret. Rather than feel ashamed, share what happened with the group so that we can support each other. If you start cheating or bingeing, just stop. Don’t make it an excuse to keep going overboard or give up entirely. Aim for doing better, not perfect.

Have fun!
• There’s a reason this is called a challenge--changing your diet for 28 days is going to stretch you.
• Rather than focusing on what you can’t have, think about what you can have. Focus on the pleasure of experimenting with new foods rather than feeling punished by what you’re staying away from. Embrace the mindset shift!
• You’ll probably need to do more cooking from scratch than you normally would to avoid the sugars in processed foods. Experiment with new recipes and new ingredients and foods that you might not try otherwise.
• Don’t expect every sugar-free recipe to be a success--in my experience, half of them are actually terrible! But treat testing the recipes as a fun experiment, rather than something you’re succeeding or failing at. (Do share your new favorites with us, though--we’d love to try them too!)
• Involve your children and your partner. By doing the challenge together, you can support each other and hold each other accountable. It’s also a great opportunity to re-educate the whole family on healthy diet choices.
DAY 1: WHY QUIT SUGAR?

There are numerous benefits to quitting sugar, some of which you already know and some that you might not have thought of:

- Lose weight (did you know it’s actually sugar and not fat that’s a primary cause of weight gain?)
- Break your sugar addiction
- Transform your relationship with food
- Learn new cooking skills
- Improve your concentration and memory
- Increase your energy
- Gain clearer skin
- Get better sleep
- Stabilise your moods
- Balance your hormones

Use Day 1 to get excited about all the potential benefits you can gain by sticking with the challenge!
DAY 2: WHAT’S YOUR WHY?

You’ve made it through Day 1. You’re feeling proud that you’ve started, but you’re also thinking that 28 days feels like a looonnnnggg time. It’s important that you take today to think about your “why.” Why are you motivated to do this challenge? What is it you want to gain from participating?

Take five minutes or 15 to sit down with a pen and paper or just do some reflecting somewhere quiet. Ask yourself these questions:

• Why am I choosing to do this?
• What will it give me?
• How will I feel at the end of the 28 days?

Having a clear sense of purpose and a goal you can visualize is what’s going to carry you through the next 27 days. Try to be as specific as possible and keep it relevant to your own life. Here’s an example of what I used the first time I did this:

“I am going to not eat sugar for 28 days as part of this group. At the end of the 28 days, I will have changed my bad habit around eating food that quite frankly isn’t good for me. I will feel healthier and have accomplished something for myself. I will have retrained my taste buds.”

I chose to focus on how this challenge would help me shift my approach to good/bad foods, and the sense of accomplishment I would feel by doing that. Challenge!

Create a little sensory reminder for yourself that represents your goal: this could be writing the goal down somewhere, a picture of how you want to look at the end of the challenge, a song that motivates you or makes you think of your goal. Anything that makes sense to you works, as long as you’ll see it (or listen to it) every day.

Don’t forget to share your goal (and the why behind it) in the group! Telling others about your intention makes it more real.
DAY 3: HERE COME CRAVINGS...

Cravings are a normal part of a challenge like this. After all, it wouldn’t be a challenge if it wasn’t challenging! Experiencing cravings doesn’t mean that you’re weak or that you’re going to fail. We know that sugar is actually addictive, so experiencing mild or intense cravings is a normal biological response to withdrawal. The key is being prepared to deal with cravings when they do come up.

Physically:
- Stick to the meal plan you came up with before you started the challenge. Eating a balanced meal with protein, healthy fats (avocados, olive oil, nuts and seeds), and complex carbohydrates (i.e., vegetables) will keep you full and stabilize your blood sugar.
- Wait it out. If you’ve been in the habit of riding the energy roller coaster when it comes to your diet and your blood sugar, it’s going to take a few days for your body to stabilize, even with eating well-balanced meals. If you can make it through about the first four days, the next 24 will feel like a comparative breeze.
- Listen to your body. What you think you’re craving might not actually be what you’re craving. It can be easy to mistake cravings for certain micronutrients for cravings for sugar. By sitting with the craving and not reaching for a candy bar immediately, you might be surprised to discover that you can tune into the more specific craving (and satisfy it with a healthier option). Getting to this point requires really listening to the cues in your body, but you’ll have plenty of time to practice this month.

Mentally:
- Addressing cravings is as much about your mindset as your physical state.
- Cravings are like emotions: they arise in response to various triggers and eventually they always pass. Just as you learned as you grew up that you didn’t need to act on every emotion, you don’t need to act on every craving.
- Practice noticing and acknowledging your cravings then letting them pass.
- Or, if you find yourself ruminating on a craving, look for something else to take your mind off of it (a workout, calling a friend, taking a bath, reading a good book).
- Experiment with both approaches to find out what works best for you.
DAY 4: WATCH OUT FOR VISUAL TRIGGERS

We’re bombarded by images all day every day. The visual triggers surrounding us are so pervasive that we rarely notice them consciously (but they certainly act on our minds subconsciously).

A significant number of us are visual thinkers: just thinking the word cake cues up an image of a gooey, fudgy, velvet chocolate masterpiece on a cake stand. The next thing we know our mouths are watering. When we’re being bombarded by so much visual stimulation, we often find our cravings are getting triggered without ourselves even being aware of it.

When you catch yourself feeling triggered, try to slow your thoughts down. See if you can trace back to a particular image that triggered you, whether it’s something outside yourself or a passing train of thought that got you visualizing something sweet. Often, just acknowledging the existence of the trigger can strip it of some of its power to affect you.
DAY 5: OVERCOMING TRIGGER POINTS

When you do feel triggered, what can you do to help yourself?

Learn your triggers

• At 2pm do you always go in the break room and start snacking? When you go to the movies, do you always buy a big soft drink?

Break the habit with a new routine

• Take a break at 2, but instead of going to the break room, take a walk outside, or listen to a short podcast at your desk
• Swap out the soft drink for a bottled water or have a piece of fruit before you get to the theater so that you’re not hungry for a snack when you arrive. Or, get there a little late so you don’t have time to stand in line for concessions if you don’t want to miss the beginning of the movie.

Reward yourself

• When you’ve successfully worked around a trigger, give yourself a little (non-food) treat. Give yourself a foot bath or buy a small, affordable gift for yourself, like flowers.

Spend a little time thinking through a typical day or week and trying to recognize and become aware of your triggers. The more you’re able to anticipate, the more you’ll be able to plan an alternative strategy ahead of time.

DAY 6: HOW MUCH SUGAR IS IN THAT?

Sure, you know that a soft drink has a dangerous amount of sugar in it. But do you really know how much sugar is in some of the other foods you’re eating daily?

Check out these short videos—you might be surprised:

How Much Sugar Is in Your Food?
The Crazy Amount Of Sugar Hiding In Random Foods

Of course, these are just a small sampling of miscellaneous foods. But if you found that surprising, you might want to start taking a closer look at those nutrition labels.
**DAY 7: WHY QUIT SUGAR?**

You’re a week into the challenge. Maybe you set some time aside to prep at the beginning of the challenge by cleaning out the pantry and picking up some fresh produce. But now your regular life has reared its head and the you-know-what is about to hit the fan. What can you do to make it as easy as possible to stay on track?

**Meal plan**
- Try to come up with a meal plan a couple days before the start of a new week. The fewer people you need to feed in your household, the easier this will be.
- While trying a new recipe is fun, trying 7 new ones in a week can be overwhelming. Make a double or triple batch of something early in the week and do leftovers on busy nights.
- Keep it simple: Cook up a steak or some frozen fish fillets with a big side of broccoli or your favorite vegetable. Chop up some veggies on Sunday and throw together a big salad (use olive oil and lemon juice for the dressing). Put hamburger, beans, and tomato sauce in a pot for an incredibly easy chili (just double check there’s no sugar added to the tomato sauce).

**Grocery Shop**
- Make a list: Use your meal plan to draw up a list of what you need before you go to the store then stick to it!
- Shop the edges: Most grocery stores are arranged so that the fresh food, like produce, meat, and dairy, are around the edges of the store. The stuff in the aisles is more likely to be processed (and probably full of sugar).
- Don’t go hungry: Even with a list, it’s going to be hard to resist that candy bar at the checkout on an empty stomach. If you’re on the go, down a handful of walnuts before you go in: you’ll be feeling satiated by the time you’re presented with temptation.

**DAY 8: MINDFUL VS EMOTIONAL EATING**

You just got dumped. Or maybe you had a particularly rough day at work. The next thing you know you’re on the couch with a stomachache and an empty pint of ice cream with almost no idea how you got there.

For the majority of us, our relationship to food is either summed up as “mindless” or “emotional.” Either we eat without thinking or we eat to soothe our emotions: stress, anxiety, depression, sadness, frustration, sometimes even joy. Or both. In either case, we’re likely to seek out sugary comfort foods or overeat because we’re not paying attention or we want that dopamine hit to give us a mood boost. The good feeling might last for a little while, but pretty soon our blood sugar drops and we’re feeling even worse than before.

But it doesn’t have to be this way.

Practicing mindful eating can go a long way in a short time towards reprogramming our relationship with food. Mindful eating is exactly what it sounds like: staying mindful of and present to our experience while we eat. Some mindfulness practitioners will spend an hour eating three raisins, but you don’t have to get that extreme (unless you want to!).

Take one meal—or even one snack—to engage in some mindfulness practices.

- Turn off the distractions: don’t watch T.V., don’t read, don’t browse the Internet, don’t even listen to music. Treat your meal like you would a first date and give it your full attention.
- Eat alone: As much as food is a social experience in virtually all cultures, a stimulating conversation can be just as distracting as a T.V. show to your experience of your food.
- Engage all of your senses: Food isn’t just about taste. Before you start eating, take a few deep breaths. Look at your food. Smell it. Listen to how it sounds when you bit into it. Feel your body and notice when you’re feeling full.
- Put the fork down: One of the simplest practices for mindful eating is to put your utensil down between every bite. This practice helps you stay in awareness of every bite you’re eating (and whether you even want it), as opposed to our usual habit of shoveling food in one mouthful after another.
DAY 9: THE INTERNET IS YOUR FRIEND

Yes, the Internet is where your OYNB group is, so you’ve already got plenty of virtual friends in your corner. But one of the biggest challenges to making a significant change in your diet is knowing what you can eat. If you’ve been used to box dinners or even Grandma’s old recipe book, scrapping your past go-tos can leave you feeling adrift and unsure in the kitchen. This is where the magic of the Internet comes in:

There are literally zillions of brand new recipes out there, just waiting for you to give them a try. A simple Google search of “no-sugar (fill in the blank with your favorite dish)” will give you plenty to pick from. Or you can branch out completely into something totally new. I also recommend giving Pinterest a try, you can easily find visuals of recipes and gravitate towards what looks appealing. Plus creating a board of your own will give you a virtual recipe book where you can pin the recipes you want to test.

Remember to set your expectations: not every recipe you try will be a success, so approach it with an attitude of fun. And pick things that are at or below your skill level: if your cooking skills have primarily amounted to pre-heating the oven up until now, choosing a recipe that requires Master Chef level skills is just setting yourself up for failure. You’re already challenging yourself with one new thing, so there’s no need to overdo it. As you get more comfortable, you can start upping the difficulty.
DAY 10: FIND THE YES

The more we think about something we can’t have, the more likely we are to want it. We may not have wanted a new pair of shoes or a blow-up dinosaur suit, but as soon as someone (even if that someone is ourself) tells us we can’t have it, suddenly it’s all we can think about.

As you’ve started this challenge, you’ve likely been focused on all the “no’s”: You’ve told everyone about your no-sugar challenge, you dumped the sugar-added foods in your house with a litany of no’s, you’ve been saying no to everything from cake to salad dressing. Your willpower is starting to feel the strain.

Luckily, this challenge is not meant to be about no: it’s about YES!

Remember the list from Day 1?

Lose weight (did you know it’s actually sugar and not fat that’s a primary cause of weight gain?)

• Break your sugar addiction
• Transform your relationship with food
• Learn new cooking skills
• Improve your concentration and memory
• Increase your energy
• Gain clearer skin
• Get better sleep
• Stabilise your moods
• Balance your hormones

These are all things you’re saying YES to! So is your personal why from Day 2. This challenge is also an opportunity to expand your palate—to say YES to new foods that you’ve never tried before.

The next time you’re faced with the no itch, reframe your perspective. Tell yourself, “I’m not saying no to this baklava, I’m saying YES to sleeping better tonight. Then let go of the baklava and concentrate your mental energy on how great you’re going to feel the next morning.
DAY 11: RULE #6

Benjamin and Rosamund Zander wrote a book called The Art of Possibility. In it, they tell a story of two prime ministers in a meeting. Throughout the meeting, various members of Prime Minister A’s staff burst into the office to rant and rave about the latest crisis. Each time, Prime Minister A politely reminds the staff member of Rule #6, after which the staff member immediately calms down, apologizes, and leaves the room. Prime Minister B is astonished and impressed and asks Prime Minister A what Rule #6 is.

“Simple,” Prime Minister A says, “Rule #6 is don’t take yourself so god*$#n seriously.”

The no-sugar challenge is, well, a challenge. Making meal plans, reading labels, saying no, and generally asking your brain to engage in change is hard work. But when it comes down to it, this is also supposed to be fun! When you catch yourself feeling stressed about sticking with the challenge, remember Rule #6.

DAY 12: TREATS IN THE OFFICE

It’s a coworker’s birthday, or someone has brought in extra holiday treats, or you’re faced with the box of doughnuts that accompanies the Tuesday meeting. What do you do? If you’re ambushed with some sugar, having a few strategies in your back pocket will help you stay on track:

• Avoid the break room. You’ll have an easier time facing temptation if you literally don’t face it. At least for the course of the 28 days, stay out of the break room as much as possible. If you need to get away from your desk, go for a short walk instead.
• Don’t be secretive. The more people you tell about the no-sugar challenge, the easier time you’ll have sticking to it. People will manage their expectations accordingly (except not asking why you are not having some!) and they’ll often help keep you on track.
• Have alternatives ready to go. Stock up your desk with some extra no-sugar snacks. Bring your lunch from home every day. You can still be involved in the social aspect of the situation—just don’t have what everyone else is having.
• Just because it’s in your hand doesn’t mean you have to eat it. If you’re in a situation where you really feel it would be rude to refuse, take a slice of cake (or whatever’s on offer). Then just hang on to it until you can discreetly dispose of it, no one will be the wiser.
DAY 13: TASTE THE RAINBOW

Just because you can’t eat Skittles doesn’t mean you can’t enjoy the rainbow. Not only does getting a variety of colors on your plate look lovely, it’s also better for your health: the more variety you get in your diet, the more micronutrients you’ll be getting as well.

It’s great to mix things up throughout the day, but it can also be fun to pick a particular color or food to focus on one day, especially if it’s something new. In fact, you could spend a week going through each color of the rainbow:

Red: Tomato. Test out a homemade pasta sauce. Depending on your comfort level, you could stew the tomatoes yourself or start with a can of no-sugar added tomato sauce as a base. Sneak in some extra colors by tossing some heirloom tomatoes onto a salad.

Orange: Cantaloupe. Just a plain slice of melon is great with breakfast, but it’s not the only thing you can do: try out this recipe for Jerk Tacos with a Cantaloupe Salsa.

Yellow: Squash. Summer or winter, adding some squash to your meal will give it a brilliant pop of color. I’m partial to a grilled summer squash in the summer and a butternut squash soup in the winter. Spaghetti squash also makes an excellent and brilliantly colored replacement for traditional spaghetti noodles.

Green: Greens. There are all sorts of fabulous green foods out there that you can give a try. However, I recommend taking an opportunity to expand your palate of greens beyond the blandness of iceberg lettuce. Whether it’s arugula, endive, cress, mesclun, or something else you can’t pronounce, take a risk at the grocery store and add something new to your salad.

Blue: Blueberries. Berries (or any variety) are an excellent source for antioxidants. Add them to your morning oatmeal for a healthier sweetener than sugar or snack on them with some nuts for a mid-afternoon boost.

Indigo: Black beans. While they aren’t truly indigo, black beans are a food you should be adding to your diet regardless. They’ve got loads of healthy protein, fiber, and micronutrients. They’re also incredibly versatile—you can use them for anything from a simple rice-and-beans dish to black bean brownies (if you’re looking for a healthier remix when the challenge is over). If you’re interested in doing Meatless Mondays, black beans make a great base for all kinds of meals.

Violet: Cabbage. If you aren’t eating cruciferous vegetables (including cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and more) already, you’re doing yourself a serious disservice. Cruciferous vegetables are full of phytochemicals and antioxidants that support your health—there’s some evidence that eating them regularly can reduce your cancer risk. They also contain tons of healthy fiber (just be warned that that means they can make you a little gassy or bloated if you overdo it). Toss some cabbage on a salad for a nice pop of color or add a cabbage slaw as side dish or burger topping.
DAY 14: SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

“Whether you think you or you think you can’t - you’re right!” – Henry Ford

Life is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It’s the way that you feel about your life that determines how you see your life. It’s so simple: whether you believe you can or you can’t--you’re probably right! Take a few minutes to digest this quote.

Now that you’re at the halfway point, take a moment to decide for yourself if you’re ready to recommit to the remainder of the challenge.

DAY 15: UNSUPPORTIVE FRIENDS/PEOPLE WHO TRY TO GET YOU TO “CHEAT”

Here you are, over halfway through the challenge, and things are going great. The intensity of your cravings is starting to dissipate, you’re building momentum, and you’re feeling confident about the remaining days of the challenge. Maybe you have a few people in your corner doing the challenge with you, or your family has at least agreed to avoid eating ice cream in the same room you’re in.

But you’ve got that one friend who won’t leave it alone. Maybe it’s the coworker who insists on offering you something from the bowl of candy on his desk every time you need to ask for a form. Or it’s the friend who tries to cajole you into splitting dessert when you meet up for dinner because she “can’t possibly eat it all herself!” These people know you’re doing the 28-day challenge, but they won’t let it go.

How to cope? Borrow a line from Nancy Reagan and “just say no.” Smile politely and say no thanks, no matter how many times they offer or insist. The key is to not take it personally. In my experience, the more trouble someone has accepting your abstinence, the more likely it is they’re uncomfortable with their own relationship to that thing. Maybe your coworker has already had 6 pieces of candy today and wants someone else to eat a piece so he doesn’t feel so bad about it. Maybe your friend was shamed by a parent for overdoing dessert as a kid and is self-conscious about enjoying a piece of cake alone.

Don’t let their anxieties become your own. Remind yourself of your goals from Days 1 and 2 and stay firm. In the long run, modeling a healthy attitude towards food will be the kindest thing you can do for these people.
DAY 16: DRINK UP!

Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate! You’ve definitely heard the recommendation to drink two litres of water every day. If you’re not doing it already, now is the perfect time to start. Our bodies often mistake thirst for hunger, so when you find yourself dragging, drink off a glass of water and see how you feel before reaching for a snack.

If two litres sounds like more than you can manage, try doing 500 ml first thing in the morning after you get up. It’ll really help to prime your digestion, and you’ll already have knocked out a quarter of your total for the day without needing to think too hard.

It’s also a good idea to drink a glass before each meal if you can. By starting with water, you’ll notice your body’s fullness cues more quickly and avoid overeating. By drinking before the meal, you’ll also flush the water right through your system, as opposed to drinking during the meal, when the water can dilute your stomach acid and affect your digestion.

If you’re struggling to make the switch from soft drinks to water, try adding some cucumber or fresh fruit slices to your water to give it a little flavor boost. You can even find water bottles with a special compartment designed for infusing your water.
**DAY 17: EMERGENCY STASH**

Having a meal plan is an excellent and important tool for getting through the month. But, there’s going to be days where you’re on the go or plans change at the last minute and you’ll need to have a back-up plan. Keeping an emergency stash of healthy snacks can be the difference between staying strong and giving in to that candy bar.

Here are a few snacks we recommend:

**Nuts and seeds**

Nuts and seeds will be your new best friend on this challenge. They’re full of the perfect blend of protein to keep you energized and healthy fats to keep you full. Walnuts, Brazil nuts, cashews, and hazelnuts are all high in omega-3 fatty acids as well to keep your brain sharp. Almonds are my own personal favorite, but experiment with some different varieties or create a DIY mix to find out what you like best.

**Banana**

Bananas (or apples or oranges–any fresh fruit that travels well) are also a great option. Throw one in your bag or briefcase when you’re leaving the house in the morning as an extra backup. You should still be careful with fruits–even with the fiber that comes along from whole fruit, the natural sugars can still cause a slight spike in your blood sugar. If you can, try to pair it with some protein or a healthy fat to keep things balanced. If you’re not able to do that, make sure you start your next meal with some protein to get your body back on track as quickly as possible.

**Hard Boiled Egg**

While an egg is a little more delicate to carry around than a banana or a packet of nuts, it’s your best option for a complete meal replacement. Hard boil one or two dozen at the beginning of the week, then stock some in the fridge at work. If you forget a lunch or have to run out to an appointment, take one with to eat on the go. I like to sneak salt packets from cafes for a little single-serving topping, too.

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**DAY 18: AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE**

One of the greatest benefits of the no-sugar challenge is that it’s not just about sugar. Even if you slip up every single day of the challenge, actively engaging in the process does something important for your brain: it breaks up your habitual patterns of thought and behavior. All throughout these 28 days you’re rewiring healthier habits into your brain.

Take maximum advantage of this rewiring period to start stacking other healthy habits into your life. Practicing gratitude is one of the best things you can do for your health and happiness. Start a daily gratitude journal where you write down 2 or 3 things every morning or evening that you’re grateful for: anything from a close personal relationship, to access to running water, to hearing your favorite song on the radio.

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**DAY 19: SELF CHECK-IN: HOW ARE YOU REALLY FEELING?**

As we mentioned on Day 8, there’s a strong connection between food and our emotions. Many times when we reach for something sweet, we don’t even consciously recognize that we’re trying to fulfill an emotional need.

When you feel a craving coming on, slow down. Check in and ask yourself how you’re really feeling. Are you actually hungry? What emotions are you experiencing right now? What are you hoping to experience when your craving has been satisfied?

If it’s truly a physical craving, choose a healthy fat instead. If it’s emotional, think about what you feel like you’re missing and look for another option to fill that void. Do you want connection? Call a friend. Are you feeling sad? Pull up a couple funny videos on YouTube. Check in with yourself after the alternative activity: is the emotion gone? Is there something else there you need to address? Rinse and repeat.
DAY 20: EATING OUT

Eating away from home can be tricky during the no-sugar challenge. Of course, you know to skip dessert (if you’re worried about the reaction of your dining companions for any reason, practice what you’ll say ahead of time). But where else in the meal can you get tripped up?

Drinks
If you are drinking, stick to something straight—mixed drinks will have added syrups or sweeteners.

Salad
Salad might seem like a safe bet, but many premade dressings have sugar added. Balsamic vinegars are often high in sugar, too, so request olive oil and red wine vinegar or a lemon wedge if you can.

Main course
More than likely, you won’t have the opportunity to see a complete ingredient list for any of the dishes. Just like what you’ve been cooking for yourself, remember that the simpler the dish the better: a cut of meat or fish with simple sides is less likely to have sugar added than a pasta sauce or multi-ingredient mixed dish.
DAY 21: WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

There’s a reason you chose to do this challenge. I don’t mean your specific personal reasons for wanting to cut back on sugar, but your reasons for joining this particular OYNB 28-Day No Sugar Challenge. Objectively, there’s never been anything stopping you from deciding to cut out sugar for a month on your own. But participating in a challenge like this is often more effective precisely because you’re not doing it alone.

Yes, we’re giving you some structure and tips that make things a little easier than going it alone. But the two biggest benefits you’re getting from this group are:

(1) Support
and
(2) Accountability

As a whole team, we’ve got your back. Everyone in the group is here to support you by sharing their stories and listening to yours, as well as providing helpful feedback and advice on what’s worked for them.

Perhaps more powerful than the support is the accountability. You’ve got a whole crowd of people who are here rooting for your success. When you’re just one person, it’s easy to give up and tell yourself that you’re just too (busy, stressed, weak, all of the above) to follow through. If you give up on the OYNB challenge, though, you’re not just letting yourself down— you’re letting all of us down, too.

We never want to shame you for slipping up. But when you’re having a hard day, remember that all of us are right there with you: we’re all in this together. Let the rest of the team inspire you to continue, and remember that your continued success is inspiring all of us, too.
DAY 22: THE HUNGER SCALE

When most people hear the words “food” and “scale,” they only think of one kind of scale—the kind that tells you how much you weigh. But did you know there’s another “scale” dietitians use to help you get healthier?

The Hunger Scale is a tool developed by nutritionists that helps you to rate your hunger (or fullness) and decide whether it’s time to eat or not. There are 9 stages:

0: Empty
1: Ravenous
2: Very Hungry
3–4: Lightly Hungry
5: Neutral
6–7: Lightly full/Satisfied
8: Full
9: Stuffed
10: Sick

We can all recognize that “Stuffed” and “Sick” are dangerous, but “Ravenous” and “Very Hungry” are risky too: if we’re so hungry we’re getting hangry or can’t think about anything but food, we’re likely to end up overcompensating and bingeing out. Ideally, you should always be hanging out in the 3 to 7 range. Once your hunger starts to dip towards a 3, it’s time to eat. And when you’re getting close to feeling like a 7, it’s time to stop (there’s a delay between when our bodies are actually satiated and when we start feeling full, so if we wait until we’re at an 8 to stop eating, we’ll overshoot the mark and go right on into 9).

If you’ve been on the blood sugar roller coaster or just been in the habit of eating mindlessly, you’re out of touch with your hunger cues. Using the hunger scale can help you get back in tune with your body.
DAY 23: WHAT TO DO IF YOU SLIP UP

It happened. You slipped up. You ate something you weren’t supposed to--maybe a lot, maybe a little.

Guess what?
It’s okay.

OYNB is not about shame. We don’t believe that a lapse negates everything you’ve accomplished up to that point. We’re not going to kick you out of the group or tell you that you need to start the challenge over. We think the best way to get past a slip up is to (1) acknowledge it happened and (2) let it go. Share what happened with us in the group, then let go of the desire to berate yourself and pick up where you left off.

DAY 24: BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

We introduced the idea of habit stacking on Day 18 when we talked about an attitude of gratitude. Exercise is another excellent healthy habit to introduce during the no-sugar challenge.

Doing more exercise and eating less sugar reinforce each other in a positive upwards cycle. Cutting back on sugar stabilizes your blood sugar, giving you more consistent energy levels throughout the day, so you’re more primed to work out. In turn, exercise releases endorphins, giving you the same feel-good boost you would get from a sweet snack, cutting down on your cravings.

You can find all kinds of information on the most effective types of exercise, but remember that the best exercise for you is the one you’ll stick with.

DAY 25: SUGAR’S MOOD EFFECTS

If you’re going through your day swinging between feeling violently hangry and sleepily stupefied, you may think that’s just a product of the daily stresses of life. In reality, your mood swings could be a result of rapid changes in your blood sugar caused by too much sugar intake.

In the short term, overdoing your sugar intake can make you crabby and irritable, but it has some scary long-term effects too. More and more research is suggesting that sugar has addictive properties--too much can start messing with your brain chemistry. Some studies have also shown links between sugar intake and depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia. While sugar doesn’t necessarily cause any of those mental health issues, it can make them worse.

In short, cutting back on sugar isn’t just for cutting down your waistline--it’s also a way to make you a happier person (and who doesn’t want that?!).
DAY 26: SPECIAL OCCASION

You've committed to the 28-day no-sugar challenge. But now it's Valentine's Day, and your partner always buys you a big box of chocolates. Or your best friend is hosting his annual backyard shindig. Or it's your birthday. Do you decide to take the day off from the challenge? Or do you find another way to make it work?

Of course, if you want to make an exception, that's up to you. Part of the challenge is about re-assessing your relationship with sugar. If you can take the day (or even a few hours) off as a conscious choice and feel confident that you're in control, there's nothing wrong with that.

That said, we would encourage you to stick with the challenge. You can always find a reason why something can be an exception, and sometimes the line can get blurry between when you're in control and when you're making excuses. And remember how you felt during the first few days of the challenge? Those nasty cravings and mood and energy swings? While just taking one day off won't have such an extreme effect, it will still take you at least a full 24 hours after breaking the challenge for the physical effects to wear off.

So what can you do instead?

Plan ahead: if there's an event or national holiday coming up that you know will be a test, plan a strategy in advance. Tell your family about your challenge and ask them not to offer any sweet treats (or to hang on to them until your challenge is over).

Make alternate plans. It might be hard to imagine your own birthday without a cake. Rather than trying to pretend like a fruit salad is an equivalent replacement, plan something totally different instead. Do something out of the ordinary that you've always wanted to, like going skydiving or playing hooky from work to go to the movies. (Just don't mention to your boss that this was OYNB's idea ;)) By changing things up completely, you won’t even think about what you’re missing.

Focus on the social aspect, not the food. Instead of skipping the party, eat a filling meal beforehand so that you won’t be tempted to snack at the event. Or, offer to bring a dish to share and make something you know will be okay for you to eat.
DAY 27: CHEW YOUR FOOD

We mentioned this briefly on Day 8 when we introduced mindful eating. Taking some time to dive more deeply into this particular practice will help mindful eating become more natural for you. It’s also something you can practice in any setting, even when you don’t have the option to give your complete and total attention to your food.

There’s no official magic number for how many times you should chew your food: after all, it doesn’t exactly make sense to chew on a spoonful of soup the same number of times as a piece of steak. The general recommendation is that you chew until the food is totally liquefied—and only then should you swallow and take a new bite.

You might be surprised at how much more you pay attention to the taste of the food when you’re trying to concentrate on chewing it. Surprisingly, that sickly sweet cookie starts to seem kind of bland (and the preservative after taste not very good) in comparison to the lightness and complexity of a slice of mango or the juicy, acidic zing of a cherry tomato.

Taking your snack or meal one bite at a time, you’ll notice your hunger cues quicker as well. Where before you might have shoveled the whole pork chop in your mouth without hardly tasting it, only to fill overfull and bloated afterwards, now you might realize three-quarters through that you’ve really had enough (and enjoyed it too).

Not only does this force you to slow your eating down and taste each bite fully, it’s better for your digestion. The smaller the food particles that you swallow, the easier it is for your digestive system to absorb their nutrients (the less likely you are to have gas and bloating, too!).
DAY 28: YOU MADE IT!

Congratulations!! It’s Day 28! You’ve made it 4 whole weeks with no added sugar!
Make today about two things--celebration and reflection.

You owe yourself some massive props for making it through the challenge. Hopefully you told lots of people about the challenge while it was in progress, but either way, shout it from the roof tops now. Everyone who has supported you for the past month will want to share your success with you.

Do something extra special for yourself. Maybe don’t binge out on an entire package of Oreos, but use this milestone as a reason to do something kind for yourself. Maybe it’s splurging on that special purchase you’ve been holding off on (if you can afford it) or treating yourself to an activity that doubles up on the wellness factor like a massage.

Sometime during the day though, be sure to take a few minutes to reflect. How are you feeling, physically and mentally? How does your relationship to sugar and food feel different after 28 days? Do you feel more connected to whatever your personal “why” for participating in this challenge was? What changes will you continue with or add to your life going forward?

28 days is just the beginning!
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