

I TRIED... GOING SUGAR FREE

January is the perfect time to rethink your relationship with the sweet stuff. Here, health writer **Natalie Ticehurst** looks at the benefits

Deep down, we all know that we should probably consume less sugar. After all, eating more than 30g daily of the 'free' sugars added to food or drinks, or found in such products as honey, syrup or fruit juice, can increase the risk of diabetes, obesity and heart disease*.

Even artificial sweeteners, such as those found in 'diet' drinks, can have damaging effects. 'Unlike sugar, these sweeteners aren't digested, but they may affect the balance of gut bacteria and

lead to glucose intolerance and obesity**,' says Dr Louise Wiseman, a medical writer and former GP.

Skincare expert Dija Ayodele adds: 'Sugar has links with inflammation† so, if you're prone to flare-ups, it may worsen them. Glycation also occurs: sugar attaches itself to collagen in your skin, making it brittle and possibly weakening the skin's barrier function. Breakage can show up as wrinkles, fine lines or a loss of elasticity.'

Quitting sugar may seem like a no-brainer – but it

can be a tricky habit to break. 'If you deprive yourself of something, you'll find you think about it more often††,' says Dr Louise. 'Sugar also releases the feel-good hormone dopamine, so as sugar levels drop, we slump and need more to regain the feeling‡. However, once you start to eliminate sugar, cravings should reduce‡‡ as brain receptors regulate and your taste buds adapt‡‡. Here's what happened when Natalie put her theory to the test...

MY SUGAR-FREE FORTNIGHT



'This will be a doddle, I thought – I don't really have

a sweet tooth. However, as wellness expert Simone Thomas inspects my food diaries, eyebrows are raised at my lattes (my oat milk of choice is sweetened), pasta sauces and salad dressings: all laden with sugar!

'On day one, I gaze longingly at some biscuits, but settle on a few Medjoul

dates as a compromise. Biscuits they're definitely not, but I get an energy hit.

'By day three, the urge to stick my head in a bag of pick-and-mix has passed, as have the headaches that are a common withdrawal symptom. Then, work stress

'BY THE END OF WEEK TWO, I'M NO LONGER A SLAVE TO MY CRAVINGS'

leaves me feeling flat, and I reach for a diet fizzy drink... Sadly off-limits! I put the can back in the fridge and sulk.

'By the end of week two, I'm no longer a slave to cravings, my energy levels are consistent, my jeans are looser, and I sleep better. Plus, my face is blemish-free.

'The verdict? I'm aiming to stick to my new sugar-free ways. And what of that frothy latte? I've switched to no-added-sugar nut milk. It's a small price to pay!'





TRY THESE...

Got a craving for a cola or a sugary snack? No-added-sugar nibbles or some unsweetened infused sparkling water may help to stop it in its tracks...



Asda Nut Selection, £1.99 (200g; 1p/100g)



Asda Cucumber Batons, 40p (80g; 50p/100g)



S. Pellegrino Essenza Dark Morello Cherry & Pomegranate, £3.99 (6 x 330ml; 20p/100ml)

DITCH THE SWEET STUFF!

Wellness expert Simone Thomas shares her top tips for cutting the cravings and crashes.

1 BANISH SUGARY FOODS

If you can, clear your home of biscuits, cakes, sweets and other sugary foods. Don't forget to check the ingredients and traffic light panels on packets for hidden sugars – products such as sauces, yogurts and even some bread may contain a surprising amount. Get rid of these and temptation will be less likely to strike.

2 START SMALL

If the idea of ditching the sweet stuff all in one go fills you with dread, set yourself smaller targets, such as skipping dessert after dinner or saying no to sugar in your latte. Build on your goals a little each day, until you manage a week and then a month of being mostly sugar-free. After that, you should find it a lot easier.

3 DON'T GO HUNGRY

Hunger can make us want to reach for sugar-packed snacks, so make sure you always have something healthy to nibble on, such as some vegetable sticks or unsalted nuts. Stay well hydrated, too – it's easy to mistake thirst for hunger, so keep your water bottle topped up!