Memoirs of a Sugar Addict

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

This project has gone through many transformations. Originally, it was going to be a musical project. I was going to finish and then record some songs that I have been in the process of composing for the last four years. When it came time work on the songs, however, I found I could hardly force myself to sit down at the piano. What I did instead was sit in my room and read book after book about nutrition. Little did I know my form of "procrastination" was going to serve as a base for this project.

In this project I discuss a substance that many of us know and love—sugar. In November of 1996, I discovered William Dufty's book, *Sugar Blues*. Since then, I have been trying—without permanent success—to cut all forms of refined sugar out of my diet. The process has been enlightening, discouraging, painful, and rewarding.

After reading Dufty's book, I realized that we as Americans are in a difficult position. Research shows that sugar is a potentially harmful and addictive substance. As Americans we can listen to the research, decide to take responsibility for our health, and quit eating sugar. Of course, quitting means going through painful physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms. Not many of us like to go through pain. Our other option is to ignore the research and continue feeding our sugar habit. Though this option may seem more appealing in the present, choosing this road will only lead us to pain in the future. We've gotten ourselves into quite a predicament, then, haven't we? Either way, it's going to hurt.

Even though I don't like it, I know I have a duty to quit eating refined sugar. If I lived in my own air-tight little world, I'd probably keep eating it. But I live in a world where my decisions and actions affect the well-being of the people around me. My actions today will especially effect my future children, and I cannot justify abusing my body when I know that their health ultimately depends on my ability to remain healthy and happy. I can only hope that most Americans will agree with me.

In the following pages, I relate some of the information I've learned about the harmful effects of refined sugar. But also, and perhaps more importantly, I discuss the challenges I have faced during my ongoing attempt to quit eating sugar.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Elizabeth Ricter, my first thesis advisor, for her willingness to assist me in my creative process, and for understanding when I decided to switch topics. Thanks to Margaret Dimoplon, my second thesis advisor, for agreeing to help me at such short notice (which means I will be able to graduate on time!). Thanks also to my fiancé, Pete Thomas, who has supported my decision to cut out sugar, and who continues to support all my crazy ideas!
MEMOIRS OF A
SUGAR ADDICT
INTRODUCTION

Why this project? Anger. Frustration.

Who is this project for? If not my generation, then the next. The information I have currently been reading about refined sugar has been out there my entire lifetime, yet I am only now coming upon it at the age of twenty-two. Why, I ask? If it has been available for so long, why don't I know about it? I've been through seventeen years of school. Why didn't someone tell me that refined sugar consumption has been linked to practically every degenerative disease that we as Americans suffer from? Why didn't I learn that in the classroom? Why didn't someone tell me that I was eating improperly, in ways that would lead me to illness? Why didn't a teacher, a parent, an uncle--why didn't someone point that out to me? Why? Because depression is good for me? Because allergies make me a stronger person? Because acne keeps me from being too vain?

Why, at age twenty-two, am I confused, tired, and burnt out on life? "Because that's just the way life is. You are going through a stressful time right now." Agreed. College is a stressful time. Graduating from college is stressful. But so stressful that the stress itself overcomes me? So stressful that I feel powerless, hopeless, alone? College has definately been stressful, and frankly, all too often, I haven't felt equipt to handle its stresses. Why? I've been through school. I've taken classes on wellness. I've learned time management skills. I've prepared myself in every way I thought possible for life's stresses. I've practiced positive thinking. I've become involved in the world around me. Why am I so stressed? Why am I depressed? What am I doing wrong?

While walking through the library searching for books that might help me figure myself out, I came upon some books which contained inside an abundance of hope that I had not been able to find anywhere else. These books told me that I was eating improperly, and that improper eating undermines one's ability to enjoy life. So simple.
Why hadn't I ever thought of that before? These books told me that if I ate properly, I would begin to feel better, look better. Not only that—I would be HEALTHY. I had just assumed that good health belonged only to children. Then life, with its inevitable stresses takes its toll and makes us unhealthy.

I thought I just had to learn to accept that at age twenty-two my body had already begun the degenerative process. I thought I had to accept that since I have "bad genes" I will always have to wrestle with depression. I will always have to smear acne cream on my face because "I am just one of those people with that problem and there's nothing I can do about it." Except of course, pay a doctor to prescribe pills and creams that I don't know how I will ever be able to afford. Especially after graduation when my parents are no longer handing over the money.

You know one thing that has always really bothered me? The fact that most doctors "don't know."

"What's wrong with me, doctor?"

"Well, patient, you are sick."

"I know, doctor, but why?"

"I don't know, patient, but take these and you'll feel better."

"What do those pills do?"

"Well, patient, we aren't exactly sure, but they seem to work and the side effects are minimal."

Am I supposed to accept that? Am I supposed to trust my life to someone who has gone through years of schooling and still "doesn't know?" As I grow older I am astounded and discouraged by the number of people running this world who simply "don't know." Well, isn't it about time we find out?

I came upon this preventative nutrition idea out of luck? Coincidence? Or maybe just because I took a little extra time one day and stopped by the library. When I read William Dufty's *Sugar Blues*, I was struck by a profound sense of thankfulness. I thought
to myself, Here is someone who knows something. Someone who has answers. Someone who can explain to me why I get depressed. Why I often feel joy-less rather than joy-full. Why my face breaks out. Why I have allergies.

After I read more and more info, I began to think, You know? I really need to change my lifestyle. But I was stuck with a dilemma. Ignorance is bliss--so the saying goes. In my ignorance, I could continue consuming large amounts of sugar without much guilt and eat pretty much whatever I wanted whenever I wanted--as long as I "drank my three glasses of milk a day and watched my fat intake." Well, the more I read, the more I realized how lacking my diet has always been, and it mortified me.

I came to a point where I had to admit to myself... "I don't like how I feel. I don't like how my life is going. In fact, life just doesn't seem worth living to me anymore." When I heard myself say that, I realized something needed to change. I had to admit that my problems were real and that I really needed to work on solving them.

Quitting sugar, I realized needed to be a top priority for me. Although, I could not verify it as the cause of my problems, I was extremely suspicious of it. I knew, at the same time, I needed to make vast improvements in my nutritional habits.

It was often difficult to continue. It was difficult to have faith that proper nutrition really is the key to good health. After all, I thought I was eating healthy before, and it didn't make a difference. Not only that, I figured I was probably a genetic mutant who was programmed to be chronically depressed and zitty no matter what I did. I still fight with this notion. It still lurks around in my brain and zaps my hope, but I have decided not to let my doubts stop me. I have chosen to make nutrition a priority in my life--sometimes over class work--because I decided I can no longer put off doing what is best for me. I can only hope that this project may somehow inspire someone else to make taking care of themselves a priority too.

My advice to the world if the world will listen is... Do it! At least consider it. Consider changing your lifestyle. Consider adding more vegetables to your diet. Consider
giving up sugar altogether. Read. Learn! There is too much information against the current American eating habits to ignore. Of that, I am certain. I don't know the scientific hows and whys. I haven't conducted any experiments, but I have read the words of people who have regained health by changing their eating habits. Their words were too powerful for me to ignore. For the sake of any children I may have in the future, I need to discover what it means to be healthy!

Life is a process. I keep reminding myself that. Throughout this process, I continue to be inspired by people who have gone before me. When I feel my motivation slipping, I go to the library and find one more book written by one more person who found relief from their ailments by improving their diet. These people gave me hope. They kept me going. At times, they pulled me out of what seemed to be a vast and dark hole.

Though it may be embarrassing at times, I feel it is my duty to share what I have gone through and what I have learned from the experience. Please, read gently.

April 28, 1997
MEMOIRS OF A
SUGAR ADDICT

My name is Jessica Tescher, and I am addicted to sugar. It sounds funny almost.

My name is Jessica Tescher, and I am addicted to sugar. These are the memoirs of a sugar addict. My drug of choice is sugar. Not cocaine. Not marijuana, heroine, not even alcohol. I never drink alcohol. I am supposedly drug free. Well, I thought I was. Getting high on life. And sugar. It sounds so funny. So foreign.

Grandma brings a plate of cookies decorated all nice and pretty. Gingerbread men maybe, with yellow iced buttons down the front.

It's never serious to me until afterwards. Until after I've consumed the sugar, felt out of control, consumed more. Then I feel miserable and I know what the cause is. Sugar. I know it's the cause. Or is it? Sugar mixed with white flour especially.

I eat it and all I can think of is more. I want more. I want more. It sounds so funny. People bake cookies and give them to friends out of love. Hmm. How could something given out of love be so... addictive? It is such a part of every day life. It's in everything. Everyone eats it. A little won't hurt. Everyone eats--

My name is Jessica Tescher, and I am addicted to sugar. I am a sugar addict. A sugarholic. These are the memoirs of a sugar addict trying to kick the sugar habit.
I.

JUST SAY NO!
Where to begin? There is so much to say!

This is where I start getting technical. Or try to anyway.

First off, what do I mean when I say refined sugar? To be perfectly honest, at this point I'm not even sure, but here's what I have to offer.

When I say refined sugar, I am speaking primarily of white refined sugar. You know ... we sprinkle it on Cheerios. Or if you don't eat Cheerios, it's that stuff found in virtually everything else you eat. What I mean is ... white refined sugar is everywhere! It is in ketchup, mayonnaise, bread, potato chips, canned soups, canned beans, salad dressing, barbecue sauce, noodle mixes, bread, breakfast cereals, apple sauces. And ... oh yeah ... it's in cakes, cookies, ice cream, doughnuts, soft drinks, Snapple, Gatorade. That certainly does not cover it all, but it's a pretty good start.

Technically, refined white sugar is a simple carbohydrate, and it is made from either sugar cane or sugar beets. After an extensive refining process, a substance is created that bears little resemblance to the original plant. The substance--white refined sugar--has been stripped of all fiber and nutrients. As a result, it is highly concentrated and enters the blood stream at a dangerously fast rate (Diamond, American Vegetarian 327).

Fast fact: Two and one half pounds of sugar beets equals only five ounces of refined sugar (Dufty 165).

I'm not a biology major so I don't understand quite how this works. What I do know is that there are two main reasons why refined sugar wreaks havoc on the body. One reason is because it is a highly concentrated substance, and another reason is because that concentrated sweetness passes quickly through the intestinal wall.
The body reacts to refined sugar as if it were glucose. In order to metabolize the excess glucose, the pancreas has to pump out large amounts of insulin. The extra insulin stays in the bloodstream and continues to burn glucose. This causes blood sugar levels to drop. When blood sugar levels are low, the brain does not get enough of its favorite food (glucose) and it gets depressed...literally. Thus, the low blood sugar leads to more sugar cravings. If those cravings are satisfied, the destructive cycle begins all over again. Only, the next time around is worse because the body has not yet recovered from the imbalance caused by the initial consumption of sugar (Diamond, _American Vegetarian_ 327). So begins the addictive and degenerative process.

What scares you the most about growing old? Going bald? Losing your memory? Getting wrinkles...or worse...cancer? I don't want to grow old period. I like having free movement of my arms and legs. I like my hair color. I like the idea that I might be able to slow down the degenerative process that is occurring within my body. It sounds too good to be true. Maybe that's why I have such a hard time believing it.

Growing old is nature's way. We grow up. We wrinkle up. Our backs hunch over and our voice starts trembling when we speak. We get tired, and we get sick. That's the way it goes. Right? I'm not so sure any more.

In seventh grade I learned that sugar was "nothing." It wasn't _good_. It didn't provide the body with any essential nutrients, but it wasn't bad either. All it did was pass through the body cleanly and harmlessly. That meant, I could swallow as much as I wanted without worrying. No harm done as long as I got my essential nutrients from other foods. This was good news to my seventh grade ears. Sugar had suddenly become a guiltless "food."

During my sophomore or junior year in high school I started counting fat grams. The diving coach (I began swimming competitively in first grade and continued through my senior year in high school.) gave us a lecture about fat. She said that eating fat would make us fat, so we should all be sure to eat less than thirty grams of fat per day. I listened
intently and began making a conscious effort to reduce my fat and cholesterol intake. I drank skim milk and ate lots of pasta because I'd been told pasta would give me the energy to swim fast (The pasta I ate, however, was refined. All refined carbohydrates, even white flour, absorb quickly into the blood stream. The result--low blood sugar, fatigue, irritability. Not exactly the kind of help I was looking for in the pool).

I also ate at least one box of candy a day. If it wasn't German Club, it was Chess Club or Student Council. One organization or another was always selling candy to try and make money. I needed something to help me make it through those boring classes. A candy bar could provide an hours worth of entertainment--provided I ate it slow enough.

One day, only minutes after finishing a box of Sprees, I started to lose my peripheral vision. I knew instantly what was going to happen next. I was going to get a splitting headache--a migraine--and if I didn't lie down soon, I would get nauseated and throw up. Well, that day, I threw up in the nurse's office before she even had the chance to tell me I could go home. I cried as I was driving home because it felt like some invisible force was crushing my head. When I finally lay down in my own bed, it hurt to rest my head against the pillow. It hurt to close my eyes. I cried and tried not to think about having to endure a lifelong migraine. Luckily, my migraines have never lasted more than a few hours. I have found that sleep is the only remedy.

After that incident, I had a strong suspicion that sugar had triggered my headache. It seemed obvious to me. But what about those other times? What had caused those migraines, I wondered? At the time, I was too dependent on my sugar to even consider giving it up. Besides, I figured sugar wasn't the problem. I thought it was just me. I thought susceptibility to migraines was just part of my genetic blueprint. Along with my acne.

If it weren't for foundation and concealer, I don't know if I would have survived my high school days. I couldn't stand girls with perfect skin. Or, I guess, I couldn't stand the fact that my skin was subject to chronic breakouts. If I complained about my skin to
my friends, they would say, "Oh, it's not that bad. You don't break out." But being the perfectionist that I am, I had a ritual of standing in front of the bathroom mirror every night. I would put my nose up to the mirror and pick at my blemishes until my skin was covered with red splotches. Then, the next morning I would try as best as I could to hide my imperfections under make-up. It was as if my arm was chained to the foundation bottle. Without it close by, I felt ugly. I did not know this at the time, but studies have suggested that white sugar and white flour consumption is a major cause if not the primary cause of many skin disorders--including acne.

Something else I didn't know is that refined carbohydrate consumption is also linked to depression. Looking back, I think I suffered my first bout of depression in seventh grade. All I knew at the time was that I felt awkward, plain-looking, and clumsy. Some may say I was just going through the normal adolescent blues, but in response to that, I ask--What is ever normal about a prolonged case of the blues? At the risk of sounding too deep... I have to wonder what we are saying about the human condition when we say unhappiness is normal. If unhappiness is the norm rather than the exception, why bother living at all?

Anyway. I suffered my second bout of depression the summer after eighth grade and it continued on into my freshman year. In the middle of the depression, I didn't know what was happening to me. All I knew was, I didn't feel connected to myself or my emotions. It was like the real me was floating out somewhere ahead of me and my body just couldn't catch up. When I started to feel better I was able to look back and recognize the episode for what it was. In my journal, I think I wrote "I was just depressed." Just depressed? Oh, it was nothing. I was just depressed. As if depression is so normal.

I suffered my third bout of depression three years ago. It was near the end of my sophomore year in college. I remember it came on in an instant almost. But before I go into that, I have to say something about stress. Obviously, stress is a component in everyone's life. As a sophomore in college, I was dealing with a considerable amount of
stress. During the month of September that year, a friend I graduated from high school with was murdered near the Ball State campus. After that happened, I jumped right back into my class work, which happened to be overwhelming anyway.

I was taking a full load of classes along with piano lessons and voice lessons, which ideally required five hours of practice time a week each. On top of that, I had a job at the front desk in my dorm, and I was rehearsing six hours a week and going on frequent road trips with the Ball State University Singers. Also, I was starting to be plagued with stage fright, which could turn the most ordinary performance into a terrifying experience.

Looking back, it's easy to see how I got run down. I got involved with so many activities initially because I loved what I was doing. But when I started doing everything I loved all at once, I got bogged down. Not to mention the fact that I was going through a particularly stressful and confusing grieving process.

Still, there was a moment when my brain "snapped." I remember it. I don't remember the exact time or day, but I do remember thinking ... Oh no, not again. I recognized the feeling the instant it came over me. It was like a wave of hopelessness poured over me, and as it washed through my body parts of my personality were temporarily erased. That part of me that is naturally spontaneous, hopeful, and inspired just sort of fell asleep for awhile.

This last bout of depression was more severe than the other two, partly because I decided not to accept it. I'd been through it enough times to know that I didn't want to go through it again. I wanted to get to the bottom of it. What was wrong with me? Why couldn't I cope with stress? Why, even when I thought I was coping effectively with stress, did I still end up feeling worn down and burnt out?

I had to know, because I knew--also from experience--that my life wasn't going to get any easier. It was just going to get harder and more stressful. I knew I was going to have to face more loss, greater mental challenges, greater financial responsibilities. How would I ever survive if I had to fight depression every three or four years?
So I went to a psychiatrist, and she prescribed Prozac. She mentioned something about serotonin levels in the brain, and when I asked if she could test to see if mine were normal, she said there was no such test. She said Prozac seemed to have a stabilizing effect on brain chemicals. When I asked her how it worked, she said, "Nobody really knows for sure, but it seems to be an effective treatment for many people." I didn't like what I was hearing. I wanted to know how to prevent depression, not how to treat it once it has occurred.

I took Prozac for a little while, and I started to feel better. I don't know if it was the medicine or the fact that I spent the summer resting and going to church. I made it through my junior year relatively sane. I definitely had my fair share of joys, but I had questions that were still plaguing me. Mainly, I wanted to make sense of what had happened to me during the previous year.

The depression took a toll on my self-esteem. It also left me with questions about my future. Was it fair to ask anyone to live with me when my moods were so unpredictable? What if I had kids, but then got too depressed to take care of them properly? What if I decided to pursue a performing career, as had been one of my previous plans, but then found myself paralyzed night after night with stage fright? And who am I anyway? Am I intrinsically happy or sad? Happy or sad?

For two years now, I've had concerns like this floating around in my mind. Once again, I know some might say "You're going through a stressful time" in an attempt to explain the depression. To that I say, Bah! That statement implies that my life must be relatively stress free for me to be happy. I don't like that. No matter how "stress-less" I try to make my life, I will always be faced with external stressors that are beyond my control. Does that mean every time I'm going through a "stressful time" I'll get depressed? That thought alone is enough to depress me.

Strangely though, it wasn't the depression that led me to begin studying the effects of refined sugar on the human body. Or perhaps it isn't so strange. What initially
prompted my studies was vanity—or what seemed like vanity at the time. Now I know it was just my natural desire to be healthy.

I'll try to make this short, but it all started at the end of my junior year in college. Near the end of the school year last year, I decided to audition for a show at the Muncie Civic Theater. The director of the show was a well-known opera singer. My sister, who was auditioning, convinced me to audition. I got a part, and it was a fun time (not entirely, but there were fun moments). I don't regret being in the show, but I see now that it ran me down. The point is, for about a week or two weeks straight, we all had to stay at the theater until late in order to get the show together on time. I would go home after a long rehearsal, fall into bed and not wake up until three o'clock in the afternoon the next day. I think that probably confused my bodily rhythms somewhat. When my sleep cycle gets messed up, of course, I break out.

School was over, the show ended, and I took away from it a collection of new blemishes. Is that a polite way to say it? Then, I went job hunting. To my chagrin, I had waited so long to apply for a job (the end of May, beginning of June), that not too many places were hiring. The department store or grocery store jobs I wanted had already been filled by eager high school or college students. I was stressed because I needed money, fast. So I did something drastic. I took a drive down McGalliard and pulled into the first place I saw that had a "now hiring" sign out front. I should have been suspicious from the start.

The place I pulled into was McDonald's. I applied one day, got a call the next day, and was interviewed the following day. Perhaps that's not quite how the sequence went, but anyway, they hired me on the spot. Once again, I should have been suspicious. Why were they so desperate for workers? Well, I found out on my first day at work.

The day started out okay. The people took relatively good care of me. They sat me down in the workroom and stuck in video tapes for me to watch. Then, one of the workers took me to the front counter and began teaching me how to use the register.
After about two hours of training, lunch time kicked in. That was the end of my formal training. For approximately the next five hours, I worked at the cash register without a break.

Have you ever encountered a hungry fast food customer? Have you ever encountered a hungry fast food customer who has to stand in a long line, and then doesn't get his or her order filled correctly? It's not pretty. Imagine standing for five hours in front of an endless line of hungry impatient customers who think they own the world because they have a five dollar bill in their hand. I give credit to those customers who are able to stay graceful and calm, even after a long wait in line. Unfortunately, I would have to say those people were the exception rather than the norm.

I can't resist adding here that hunger accompanied by shakiness and irritability is one symptom of hypoglycemia. Hypoglycemia = low blood sugar which, as I have said, is linked to refined carbohydrate consumption. Quite often, hungry fast food customers need their fix, and they need it fast. Hence the name, fast food. Or should I say, fast fix? They "need" their coke, their apple pie. They "need" the white bread on the sandwich to give them that sugar rush and to "satisfy" their hunger. But, back to my story.

As I said, I worked for at least five hours straight without a break, without anyone telling me, "This is how you punch in Double Quarter Pounder with cheese, Supersize Fries, and Supersize Diet Coke." (Yes, some people call that lunch.) I pretty much had to figure it out on my own from what the trainer had taught me only a few hours before. I went home that day, stressed to say the least. Perhaps I am a glutton for punishment, but I got up the next day and did the same thing all over again.

I went into work every morning at seven o'clock. Then around nine o'clock they'd tell me to go on break. They had to get our breaks in before the lunch, so we would all be available to work during the lunch rush. There were two things I usually allowed myself to eat during break because I thought they were the healthiest choices. Maybe they were
the healthiest choices, given the other food in the warming bin. But, of course, now that I look back, I can see how my choices exacerbated my skin problems.

Because I knew I had to eat enough to sustain me through at least five hours of hectic order taking, I usually stuffed myself during break. I ate either a regular Egg McMuffin, or Hotcakes. Along with my main course, I gulped down a carton of milk for nutrients, especially calcium. I also swallowed about six ounces of orange juice for Vitamin C. At this time in my life, I was still concerned merely with fat grams, calcium and vitamin C. I didn't think twice about eating refined carbohydrates. I had no idea they might cause me to break out.

And break out I did, embarrassingly. When the people I worked with asked me how old I was, they were always surprised by my answer.

"What grade are you in?" they'd ask.
"I'll be a senior . . . at Ball State."

Inevitably, their eyes would grow wide. "No way!" they'd say. "I thought you were in high school."

Yes, I wanted to say, I am a senior in college. Never mind the fact that I still look like a thirteen year old going through puberty.

At McDonald's, they supply the uniforms. I got to wear a lovely bright fuchsia shirt, along with a bright fuchsia visor. I didn't mind wearing the uniform because I've gotten over feeling like I have to look like a fashion model all the time. It's just that, in the uniform, there was definitely no way to hide those, what I bitterly began to refer to as boils, on my cheeks. I could stand the uniform. I couldn't stand the boils.

I continued working at McDonald's until school started, despite the pleadings of my boyfriend (now fiancé) who told me to go look for another job. He was the one that had to listen to me complain. I couldn't bring myself to quit, though. Quitting is one of those things I've never been good at. My parents, thankfully, taught me to follow through
with my commitments until the end. Unfortunately, they didn't give me guidelines as to when it was best to ignore their advice.

That job was the closest to hell I think I've ever been. I started to have grave sympathy for the slave laborers throughout history and in the present who have had to work twelve hour shifts under much worse conditions. I thought, if those people could do it, I could surely survive a few months at McDonald's.

During my time at McDonald's, I encountered a variety of faces. Puzzled by the activity occurring on my face, I usually paid close attention to other people's skin. Some had dry skin, some had oily. Some had flawless complexions. Some had mild cases of acne. Others either had severe cases, or had the scars as a reminder. I started to ask why. Why would someone's complexion be flawless, while someone else's would be riddled with acne? Is it because we're all just different? Whatever. I knew my own skin was definitely getting on my nerves. I had come to the grim realization that my skin was not improving with age, it was getting worse. I was a twenty-one year old going through puberty all over again. Or so I felt.

When school started, I decided it was finally time to see a dermatologist. When I went in for my first visit, the doctor didn't scream when he saw me. I took that as a good sign. He handed me a paper that explained what acne was. "Acne," it said "is caused by excess skin oil that becomes trapped in the pores. It is hereditary . . . blah blah blah." Also, it said, "There is no cure for acne, but it can be greatly improved with treatment," and "Diet does not seem to play a role in acne. A balanced diet is recommended."

The doctor prescribed Retin-A, and gave me a benzoyl peroxide paste to smear over my skin. Within days, my skin took on a dry, flaky appearance. I noticed I seemed to blush much easier too. I went back and told him the benzoyl peroxide stuff was drying out my face too much. He gave me an alcohol based solution that I was supposed to dab on my face, and he also gave me a prescription for antibiotics. The solution dried my face out too much too.
My boyfriend asked me, "If you have oily skin, why do you need a moisturizer?"

"Because I have dry oily skin . . . you wouldn't understand," I told him.

Three months passed by and my skin was still breaking out. The Retin-A didn't seem to be working. Perhaps I sabotaged my progress because I was so skeptical about the entire process. I just didn't understand how some magic cream was going to fix a chronic problem that I have been living with since sixth grade. I didn't even feel right taking the antibiotics. Something just wasn't right about it. I felt powerless. I was in a powerless role--the trusting patient versus the all-knowing doctor, who by the way, didn't seem to know much at all. Not enough to satisfy my questions and concerns anyway.

On my last visit to the dermatologist, the doctor said he was unhappy with my progress. He said if I didn't start improving, he was going to prescribe Acutane. I had thought Acutane was used to help only severe cases of acne. My acne wasn't severe, it was just bad enough to be annoying and make me want to hide my face. The perfectionist in me couldn't accept the chronic blemishes. The stubborn person in me had a hard time trusting the doctor. The control freak in me longed to have real, permanent control over my situation. And after reading all of Acutane's possible side effects, the rational person in me decided it would be best not to take the drug. I'd rather have a few acne scars on my face than irreversible internal damage in my vital organs.

I resented being told that I needed to take dangerous medicine to get well. On top of that, I was angered by the suggestion that my acne was the result of some innate defect in my genes. All I wanted was healthy skin. Not perfect skin. Healthy skin. I have plenty of imperfections on my face that will never go away. I can accept that. What I can't accept is the suggestion that because of my genes, I am destined to have chronically unhealthy skin.

I quarrel a lot with God. Many times during this face-hating ordeal, I lay in bed at night asking Him, what am I supposed to learn from this? Are you trying to tell me I am too vain? Is this my punishment? Do you have something against me? Are you trying to
teach me how to accept those things I can't control? But try as I might, I could not accept
the condition of my skin. I could not force myself to believe that God wanted me to learn
how to sit back and accept my situation gracefully. It just didn't seem right. That wasn't
the kind of God I was willing to believe in. So while I began re-evaluating my definition
of God, I also took a trip to the library and began to research.

I can't remember when I first heard that sugar might cause break-outs. What I do
know is that when I first read William Dufty's book Sugar Blues, I was both thrilled and
scared. In the first chapter of the book, Dufty talks about his own experiences with acne.

*Puberty brought on other terrors. My face, neck, and back exploded with
unsightly pimples . . . I know now I was suffering for my sins. If anybody
had had the perception to point it out to me at the time, they may have
saved me years of agony. But who knew about my secret sugar habit?
Who ought to have guessed (4)?*

When Dufty stopped eating sugar, a succession of wonders occurred in his body.
Because no one can state it any better than he, I'll just quote directly from the book once
more. He says:

*My rear stopped bleeding, so did my gums. My skin began to clear up and
had a totally different texture when I washed. I discovered bones in my
hands and feet that had been buried under bloat. I bounced out of bed at
strange hours in the early morning, raring to go. My head seemed to be
working again. I had no problems anymore. My shirts were too big. So
were my shoes. One morning while shaving, I discovered I had a jaw (10).*

Passages such as these brought me hope. If quitting sugar helped him overcome
his health problems, I thought the same might be true for me. I wanted to find out. But.
That meant I would have to stop eating sugar, and the idea didn't appeal to me at all. I
couldn't imagine my life without sugar. I didn't think I would be able to survive. Without
sugar, it seemed, my life would have no enjoyment in it whatsoever.
The alcoholic can't imagine life without alcohol. The heroin addict needs heroin to get through the day. I needed sugar to get through the day. Heroin destroys the addict at an alarmingly fast rate. Alcohol takes a bit longer to do its work. Sugar? I don't know how long it takes before sugar starts destroying the mind and the body. My guess is not long. Before a few months ago, I couldn't go a day without eating sugar. It was easy for me to imagine life without milk, red meat, vegetables, fruit, fish, chicken, nuts, whole grains, but not without refined sugar and refined flour. Those two substances were the foods I truly loved. All other foods, I merely liked or tolerated.

I said earlier that reading Dufty's *Sugar Blues* scared me. For one, it scared me because I began wondering how extensive the damage was that I had already done to my body. I wondered, What if it's too late to turn back now? I feared I might be a lost cause. I feared also that after quitting sugar, I might discover the root of my problems runs much deeper. What would I do then? Where would I turn?

More than anything, I feared my future. How would I ever manage to stop eating sugar? Where would I find the will power? How would I explain it to my friends and family? What would they think of me? What would I eat in place of sugar and white flour? Could I still go out to eat? How would my boyfriend, who has since become my fiancé, react when I told him we could no longer go out and splurge on those late night desserts and pizzas? Was I willing to say good-bye to all those foods? Just how sensitive was my body to sugar anyway? The questions went on and on. I felt like I was living in a cold cruel world that was out to destroy me, and to a certain degree, I was right.

But I knew I had to give it a shot. I knew after reading *Sugar Blues*, I would have a hard time justifying my excessive use of sugar. I realized that when I eat sugar, I'm not only hurting myself, I'm hurting those around me. For one, I'm difficult to be around. My fiancé would agree to that. (Not saying he's always a perfect angel, of course.) Also, what I do today will affect any future kids I may have. If my body chemistry is unbalanced, I will pass that on to my children, just as... I am quite certain, an unbalanced
body chemistry was passed on to me. When I sit down and truly think about all the damage sugar has done to me, my friends, my family, and everyone else in the civilized world for that matter, I get a bit overwhelmed.

Initially, I was angry with my parents for not keeping me away from sugar, especially since my mom said she read the book *Sugar Blues*. But as I've gone through this process of weaning myself off sugar, I've begun to understand why they were unable to do so. I realize though sugar may seem harmless, it is deceptive. For people like myself who are sensitive to it, the addiction is quite strong. The addiction is not only physical, it is also mental.

I have had to spend a lot of time soul searching during these past few months. Initially, I scolded myself because I felt I was wasting so much time. But a little voice inside my head kept saying, "First things first, Jessica." I knew my health would only continue to deteriorate in the future, if I didn't get my act together and cut out sugar. If not cut it out entirely, then at least learn how to use it in *extreme* moderation.

Because of the social issues involved, I'm not sure I will ever be able to say, "I'm never going to eat sugar again." As I said, it's everywhere, and depending on how I feel, a rare occasional splurge might be okay. But in the future, I will always eat sugar and refined flour with the knowledge that I am creating an imbalance in my body that will take time to correct. For now, though, it is important for me to stay away from it as much as possible.

If we as a society continue to consume refined sugar generation after generation, our problems will only multiply. If we do not collectively decide to start feeding ourselves more balanced nutritious meals, our children will become the victims. William Dufty's book was published in 1975. I was born in 1974. I thought good news was supposed to travel fast. Apparently, that's not always the case, however, I am thankful it has finally gotten to me.
Because I am in my prime child bearing years and am about to get married, I have had to think about how my lifestyle and habits are going to effect any potential children I may have. How can I justify ignoring this information? I have a duty to my future children to take care of my body now. If I don't take care of myself, I will only pass my problems on to my children, and that is hardly fair. My parents did the best they could, but I have to admit, I think they passed some of their problems onto me. I was angry about it for a while, but then I got over it. It's my turn, now, to pick up where they left off.

There ends my story. Here I am, finally, in the present.

I sort of sneaked away from my technical discussion of sugar, but I'll return to it once more. In Nancy Appleton's book *Lick the Sugar Habit*, she provides some startling statistics. Though the book was written in 1988, I'm sure the numbers are still valid today. The United States Department of Agriculture states that the average American consumes 130 pounds of sugar a year. That breaks down to ten pounds per month, approximately four and a half cups a week or thirty to thirty-three teaspoonfuls of sugar a day (7). Appleton goes on to explain that we, as humans, need only two teaspoons of sugar in our body at any given time to function properly. Any extra refined sugar we eat throws the body out of balance.

Appleton has some harsh words to say about sugar.

*Refined sugar, as tempting as it may be in all those cakes, candies, and cups of coffee, is, in fact, more of a drugging pharmaceutical chemical than it is a nurturing food. It has been stripped of all its nutrients and robs the body of nutrients during the process of digestion and metabolism. The minerals needed to digest sugar—chromium, manganese, cobalt, copper, zinc, and magnesium—have been stripped away in the refining process, and the body has to deplete its own mineral reserves to use the refined sugar* (9).
As Appleton tells us, sugar has only been a staple in the human diet for the past two centuries. At $2.40 a pound it was much too expensive for the average colonial American to purchase. A large-scale method of granulating sugar was devised in 1795, and as a result, farmers in Louisiana began growing sugar cane as a crop. As refined sugar became readily available, the price per pound went down. People began buying and consuming greater and greater amounts of sugar.

Unfortunately, the human body has not had time to evolve. Meats, seeds, nuts, vegetables, and fruits have been part of man's diet for quite some time; therefore, our bodies have evolved to handle the digestion of these foods. We have not evolved any mechanisms to metabolize large amounts of sugar on a daily basis. Appleton states, *In compensating for the excess, our organs and glands become overworked, exhausted, and eventually malfunction. This is what we know as degenerative disease* (10).

Everyone is different. We all have our own distinct genetic make-up. In each individual, then, problems caused by sugar will manifest themselves in different ways. I've already said that I have problems with depression and acne. I also have problems with allergies. Someone else may eat sugar, have perfect skin, yet they may struggle with weight problems. Or maybe their hair always seems dry and dull. Perhaps they have problems with tooth decay, or worse yet maybe they have been diagnosed with cancer.

One thing I feel I need to mention quickly is fat. We, as Americans, are continually being told, "Watch your fat intake." We are told that a diet high in fat and cholesterol causes heart disease, cancer, etc. Ross Hume Hall, author of the book *Food for Nought*, suggests that fat may not be the villain at all. To help prove his point, he cites the work of two physicians who compared Western life to African tribal life. He says:

*They note that diets of peoples eating natural foods vary tremendously from the high animal-protein, high animal-fat diet of the Eskimo and certain African groups to the high carbohydrate and vegetable protein diet of many other groups. A field survey of 400 Masai men carried out in*
Tanganyika in 1962 showed little or no clinical evidence of atherosclerosis, although they ate meat and milk exclusively. Cleave and Campbell . . . can not see a correlation between fat intake and disease pattern, but they note a factor common to all tribal diets: the absence of sugar and other refined carbohydrates (221-222).

Hmmmm . . . So perhaps fat isn't the cause of all our problems?

At this point, I could go into a complicated discussion on exactly how sugar assists in the degenerative process, but I will try to make this as uncomplicated as possible. For a more comprehensive discussion, I suggest reading Nancy Appleton's book, *Lick the Sugar Habit.*

In short, sugar begins by destroying mineral relationships in the body which in turn leads to improper enzyme functioning. Improper enzyme functioning means foods cannot be digested properly. When foods are not digested properly, some undigested particles enter the blood stream. The immune system attacks these undigested particles as if they were intruders. When the immune system is occupied continually with these undigested food particles, it starts to get tired from over-use. As a result, the immune system begins to break down.

When the immune system breaks down, the body is more vulnerable to stressors in the environment. Even naturally occurring substances become allergens. Not to mention the fact that a tired immune system loses its capability to fight viruses like the common cold. The common cold might not be so common if more people decided to take care of their bodies and start eating better—that means learning to eat healthy foods like vegetables, good quality meats, whole grains, and fruits. It doesn't mean eating low-fat versions of food that was processed and of poor quality to begin with.

The key word here is—STRESS. The body can only handle so much stress before it starts to deteriorate. Sugar stresses the body to an extreme degree. It is already stressful enough to live in 1997. Consuming sugar certainly doesn't make it any easier.
An important point to remember is that sugar is not the direct cause of diseases such as cancer, arthritis, and heart disease. When functioning properly, the body runs harmoniously. If a stressful element like sugar is introduced to the body day after day, the body has to use all its energy in an attempt to return to a level of homeostasis. As a result, deterioration begins where the body is genetically weakest. That is why it is possible to link sugar to so many different degenerative diseases, and why it may seem that a disease such as acne is inherited. It is not the disease itself that is inherited, but the weakness in that part of the body. When the body becomes over-stressed, symptoms will occur first in the area of the body that is weakest.

There ends my technical discussion. From here I will continue doing what I'm best at—writing about what's on my mind.

I have found books such as Sugar Blues and Lick the Sugar Habit to be extremely helpful to me during this period of sugar detox. They helped me understand what was going on in my body and provided me with hope that I might someday be able to join the ranks of sugar-free human beings. It was a little discouraging at times, however, to read what these healthy individuals were writing about in hindsight. They'd already been through it all. I was in the middle of it. They were healthy. I felt sick. For this reason, probably more than any other, I have included excerpts of my personal journal along with this essay. Hindsight is good, but it's also good to know what the middle of the storm looks like too.

For the remainder of this essay, I'd like to focus on that part of the process. William Dufty provided a good description of the history and politics behind refined sugar consumption. Nancy Appleton provided an excellent description of how refined sugar negatively affects the body. Instead of repeating what these two authors have already effectively said, I want to describe what it's like to be in the "middle of the storm." I want to relate the experiences I have had in trying to overcome my sugar habit, and perhaps offer some suggestions on how to cope with the difficulties involved in quitting.
The most important piece of advice I have to give is—Don't be too hard on yourself. As I have found, quitting sugar can be difficult for a variety of physical and psychological reasons.

Like I said earlier, sugar is everywhere and in everything. Okay. Not everything. But most processed foods sold at grocery stores contain sugar. I have my suspicions that most food manufacturers are aware of the dangers of sugar. Why else would they make it so hard for consumers to understand the ingredient lists they print on their boxes? Nancy Appleton gives us a good comprehensive list of words to look out for. Her list of refined sugars includes sucrose, honey, fructose, glucose, dextrose, levulose, maltose, raw sugar, turbinato sugar, maple sugar, galactose, brown sugar, invert sugar, dextrine, barley malt, rice syrup, corn sweetener, and corn syrup (5).

So what about my sweet tooth!? This is a question I have asked myself. I've also wondered, are there any good sugar substitutes?

First off, I have found that when I stop eating sugar, my sweet tooth begins to disappear. Unfortunately, my need to fit in doesn't subside quite so easily. Several times in the past few months, I have eaten sugar when I didn't crave it. Either, I was nervous and felt I needed it to calm my nerves, or I ate some in a social setting just out of habit. Sometimes, the uncomfortableness of sitting there doing nothing while everyone else eats a piece of cake is enough to make me forget my "mission" entirely.

I always regret it afterward because I feel bad physically and mentally. Usually, my stomach starts to hurt. It starts to feel acidic. I get edgy, tired. It's harder to wake-up the next morning. My eyelids are puffy when I wake up. My face breaks out. I have a harder time catching my breath when I walk up the stairs. Sometimes, I have heart palpitations. Sometimes, I sneeze. My skin itches, especially my face and scalp. I don't have energy to do the work I need to get done. My spirits take a downward turn. If I eat a lot of it, I start to become absent minded. I'm more likely to misplace things. I get light-headed when I stand up. My heart rate seems to speed up. My muscles and joints start to
ache. I cry easier. I don't laugh as freely--if at all. Also, once I eat sugar, I begin to crave it. Afterwards, then, I have to go through that weaning process again.

This entire process is more or less difficult depending on how much I splurge. The more I eat, the more pain I go through later. Rationally, I know sugar is not worth it. But. I'm human. Sometimes habit, my need for comfort, my need for reward, and my desire to fit in get in the way of rationality. It is easier for me to accept my failures when I remember that life is a constant learning process. Every day, I'm learning how sugar and other foods affect my body. I also remind myself that my ultimate goal is the same--to quit eating sugar except on rare, rare occasions--and I know I am already well on my way.

I think there are those times, however, when a sweet reward is a good thing. If I feel deprived I get discouraged and mad. When I get discouraged and mad, I'm more likely to eat sugar. So what about sugar substitutes?

One question I have started to ask myself before I buy food is, How natural is this product? If a product has been refined, chances are the food will be more harmful than helpful to the human body. Actually, if you find yourself referring to the food you are eating as a "product," it's probably time to reconsider.

I have learned in the past few months that, for the most part, real food does not contain emulsifiers, stabilizers, additives, artificial flavoring and colors. In other words, food is best when it is tinkered with the least. When food has been tinkered with too much, it's not really even a food and can actually act as poison in the body (like white sugar and white flour). What I'm getting at is--saccharin and Nutrasweet aren't good sugar substitutes.

At this point, I have read so much conflicting information about sugar substitutes that I'm not sure what to believe. Ideally, I think fruit is the best "sugar substitute." In grade school, most of us learned that a balanced diet is best, however, and that applies to fruit too. In Ann Louise Gittleman's book *Your Body Knows Best*, she explains how too much fruit can be detrimental to the human body.
Many people have been misled about fructose; they believe they can eat large quantities of fruit with few of sugar's side effects. Because of its high concentration of the simple sugar fructose, fruit juice eventually causes the same reaction that other simple carbohydrates do: the peak and valley syndrome of blood sugar level. What you may not be aware of is that any sugar, honey, glucose, fructose, or even that in freshly squeezed orange juice, has a negative effect on the ability of the body to fight disease (54).

I think one way to sum up Gittleman's argument is to say—All things in moderation. Be careful. Listen to your body. Don't ignore what your body is trying to tell you. Unfortunately, that's easier said than done.

So, it seems, fruit is good, but there is a such thing as eating too much of it. But what about those times when a cold piece of fruit just isn't satisfying? My answer to that is . . . I don't know. My feeling is that honey and maple syrup are better options than white sugar because they occur naturally in nature and contain some trace minerals. However, I've learned that much of the honey sold at grocery stores contains added sugar. It is probably safest to buy honey or maple syrup at a health food store. If the supplier is proud of their honey, chances are they will explain in detail where the honey came from, how it was collected, etc. Unfortunately, good quality honey and maple syrup are expensive. Maybe it's nature's subtle way of saying, we should consume these sweeteners in moderation, also.

Learning to consume sugar or any other kind of sweetener in moderation can be difficult because it involves breaking deeply ingrained habits. I have had to learn how to say good-bye to the idea of eating dessert at every meal. I've had to learn how not to go into a snack attack at night. I've had to learn how to cook with different kinds of foods. My grocery shopping has had to change drastically. I used to pride myself on being able to get through two weeks on thirty dollars. I filled my shopping cart with soups, noodle
mixes, rice mixes--all of which contained sugar. Now, I spend up to ten dollars more each week, depending on how much I can afford.

In the past few months, I've learned a lot about food. Things like--how to pick good produce, how long produce can be stored in the refrigerator, how to cook vegetables in a way that retains the most vitamins and minerals, which vegetables are good eaten raw. I've learned to buy meat at the meat counter rather than in the pre-packed packages. That way, the meat I buy is fresher and better for my body. I've learned to buy organic produce whenever good quality organic produce is available. I've learned to stay away from any pre-packaged food that has a long list of ingredients full of words I can't pronounce. I used to shop in the aisles at the grocery store, spending little or no time in the produce section. Now, I spend almost all of my time in the produce section. I've learned not to drink water out of the tap. I drink only certified drinking water.

Used to, when I was flipping through channels on the television set, I never stopped on a food show. Now, I watch the Food Network all the time. Before, I couldn't imagine why a person would want to watch someone else cook. I understand now because I want to learn how to cook! I learn something new every time I turn on the TV. I discover a vegetable I didn't even know existed. I learn how to use a new herb. I continue to be amazed every time I learn something new because I never knew such a wide variety of foods existed.

Before I decided to quit eating sugar, I never ate fish. Since then I've tried, cod, lobster, catfish, and perch. I intend to try much more. The only vegetables I ate were corn, peas, green beans, carrots, celery, broccoli, lettuce, onions, and potatoes. Now, I not only eat cauliflower, but I like it. I can eat Brussels sprouts and asparagus. I like asparagus, but I haven't discovered a good way to prepare Brussels sprouts yet. I will, though. And I never knew how many varieties of lettuce there are! Iceberg is the fast food standard. But now, I regularly eat green leaf, red leaf, romaine, and Boston. Just last week, I tried celery root. I didn't like it, but I tried it.
What I think it comes down to is that we, as citizens in the modern age, have to change our thinking when it comes to food in general, but sugar specifically. Most of us are given sugar before we can even talk. It is presented to us as a token of love, as a reward, to shut us up when we are being loud, the entertain us when we are bored; therefore, we learn to associate sugar with love, acceptance. We start to think we deserve it after we've had a bad day. We learn to eat it, not because we're hungry, but because we have nothing else to do.

As a culture, we associate sugar with joy and celebration. Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day, birthday's--all these are days to celebrate. How do we celebrate? We treat ourselves to foods containing sugar. But on the other hand, we also associate sugar with life's sorrows. We eat it to try and knock ourselves out of a bad mood. Sometimes, our lives become so stressful, we see eating sugar as our only joy.

In my opinion, we need to retrain ourselves. We need to start seeing sugar for what it is. A drug. We are taught to stay away from most drugs. Some, like alcohol, we are taught to consume only in moderation. It's time to start viewing sugar the same way. Not as a harmless food that we can partake of everyday, but as a potentially dangerous, habit-forming substance that should be consumed only on rare occasions, if at all. I know this sounds extreme, even to my own ears. It's taking me time to adjust to this new "world view." But judging by the information I have read and the intentional and unintentional experiments I've made on my own body, I think it is imperative that we all change the way we view sugar.

Instead of buying a ready made cake-mix full of sugar and white flour, why not take a little extra time and experiment with natural ingredients? Why not learn how to make delicious birthday cakes with whole wheat flour and honey? And of course, learn how to save cakes for only the most special occasions.

But, I'm one to talk. Just yesterday, I had a fudge brownie à la mode. I must admit, it tasted good, but I am paying the price today--as I always will when I decide to
eat sugar. I have to ask myself, is it really worth it? I know the ultimate answer is no. But, did I mention? I'm not perfect.

I wish I could say that I had overcome my sugar addiction, and that I am full of boundless energy and optimism. That's not the case. What I have done in the past few months is take steps towards my goal. Even though I'm not bouncing off the walls, I've reaped many benefits, including greater awareness of our power as individuals to shape our own futures. That awareness has not been easy for me to take. A big part of me doesn't want to change. A big part of me would rather blame my problems on chance so that I don't have to take as much responsibility for my day to day choices.

I went into this project as I do with many projects—full of purpose and determination probably in efforts to hide the doubt I felt inside. Unfortunately, I hampered my own progress by being so hard on myself. I've definitely learned the hard way, but at least I have learned.

I'm still struggling to reduce my sugar intake, and I'm sure will continue to do so. I suspect, one day I'll turn around and realize that I made it. I overcame my addiction! That day truly will be sweet.

Wouldn't it be great if we all decided to break the habit together? That would make my life so much easier. Since I can't retreat to a cave, however, I have to learn how to Just Say No. As time passes, I'm beginning to understand that my health and happiness tomorrow depends greatly on whether or not I Say No to sugar today.
II.

ESSAYS

POEMS

JOURNAL EXCERPTS
As I sit here eating what could be my last piece of lemon flavored cake ever, I begin this paper. The cake has fluffy yellow icing. Its main ingredient--sugar. The cake itself is moist and sweet. Its main ingredient--also sugar. Oh how I love my sweets. Hard candy, chocolate, cake, ice cream. I've grown up with sweets. Christmas would not have been the same without candy canes, red and green sugar coated cookies, M & M's in those long plastic tubes. And Thanksgiving! What would I do without the pies!? The brownies, the chocolate chip cookies? And then there is Easter, Halloween, birthdays. Birthdays.

Today is my birthday. I am twenty-two years old. What better day to kick my "sugar habit"? I've spent the first twenty-two years on sugar. I'll spend the rest sugar-free. By the way, I just finished my second piece of cake. It's my third one today. My stomach is a little queasy, but it's okay. Today is my last day to eat refined sugar. I've decided to indulge.

It all started a week ago when my boyfriend's mom gave him a vegetarian cookbook. That's when the wave of health consciousness truly hit me. As I was reading about fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, I realized that I hardly have any of those "good foods" in my diet. Whoever heard of making your own spaghetti sauce? Or marinating tofu so that it tastes like chicken? Why not just eat chicken for god sakes? And what about some of those vegetables? Eggplant? I don't think so. Legumes? Almond milk? Soup from scratch?

Then I read the small section on refined sugars. Hmmm, I thought, is sugar really that bad for you? I decided I wanted to know more about this so-called poison so I went
to the library and checked out *Sugar Blues*, by William Dufty. The author of the cookbook said that reading *Sugar Blues* prompted her to stop eating refined sugar altogether. I couldn't imagine cutting sugar out of my diet, but I was still curious enough to get the book.

Since today (Sunday) is my birthday, I went home this weekend to celebrate with my family. Sometime during the course of the weekend, I told my mom about the cookbook.

"It has a section about refined sugars, saying how bad they are for you. How they make you sick and depressed and irritable. It cited a book, too, that I'm going to read."

"*Sugar Blues*?" my mom said.

"Oh, was that a popular book?" I asked.

"Yeah," she said, "it was real trendy in the seventies."

Great, I thought. Trendy. The book was trendy. Now I'm trendy. Now I'm trendy *and* flaky. I'm a trendy, tofu eating, flaky health freak. I also tend to get tired, moody and irritable for no apparent reason, so I decided to go ahead and read the book.

I read most of it in one evening. I couldn't fall asleep that night because I just felt *sick*. Who knew that sugar was a slow, sweet, quiet killer? It sounds absurd. Sugar is nothing. It is just empty calories that flow through your body giving you a quick pick me up along the way. No one claims that it's good for you, but no one says it is all that *bad* either.

Well, some people do. Here was this man named William Dufty telling me that the body cannot handle refined sugar--that it is a poison that creates more poison in the body which leads to illness and death. I laid there in the darkness thinking about all the refined sugar I have consumed in my lifetime--wondering what that large quantity had done and is doing to my body. How could it be possible that something so sweet could be so deadly?

Before my birthday dinner today, I told my family that this would be my last day to eat refined sugar. My mom seemed to think I should ease into it.
"You're already skinny," she said.

"Why?" my dad asked.

"Because sugar's bad for you," I said.

"Who says?"

"Some guy who was really sick until he cut sugar out of his diet, then all his sicknesses went away." My argument didn't sound too convincing.

"I could never give up sugar," my sister said.

"You should read the book," I told her.

That's the story in a nutshell. Suddenly, I've turned into a health freak. Actually, this isn't so sudden... but I have gotten much more serious in the past week. I've decided to trust some guy's words to the point where I am willing to alter my diet totally because of them. I must be going crazy. I must be brainwashed. Or perhaps I'm just trusting my instincts.

It seems I have learned a very good lesson about me this weekend. I've learned that my own health is very important to me. It is so important to me that I am willing to give up ice cream.

Will I have the will power to follow through on this decision? Perhaps I should keep a copy of Sugar Blues in my pocket so I can pull it out whenever I feel myself caving in to peer pressure or to the scent of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. The sweetness of sugar is not worth the ugliness it causes, I will remind myself.

Why is health so important to me? I want to be healthy so that I can be present in the lives of people around me. Pain and discomfort direct my thoughts inward. It's difficult to concentrate on the world outside of myself when the world inside is uncomfortable and annoying. Good health is a gift that parents can give to their children. By taking care of themselves, parents are saying to their children, "I love you. I respect you. And I will do whatever I can to assure that I will be here for you when you need me." I want to be a healthy parent so that my children don't have to go through needless
worry. Of course, accidents and inexplicable events do happen, but a person should take
care of themselves despite those possibilities.

To abuse the body is to take advantage of the gifts that God has given. Often a
person in the depths of despair could care less about their body or about God. That's
understandable given their mental state. I think people who believe in God and who also
love God eventually come to realize that they must take care of their bodies out of respect
not only for God, but also for mankind. End of theological discussion.

So. I've never willingly consumed an alcoholic beverage, and I've never willingly
inhaled cigarette smoke. I've breathed in second hand smoke, and I had a teaspoon of
alcohol when I was very young. I gave up caffeine a while back, though I still have it
occasionally. Not anymore though. I should have known sugar was the next, inevitable
step. It is with deep regret that I give up refined sugar, but how can I ignore the
evidence? Sugar is in no way good for me. It tastes good, but eating it just makes me
crave more bad stuff. So. Good-bye sugar. I sigh and move on.
I WILL

Yes.
I will love myself again.
And I will find new goals
Or I will tangle with the old some more
To see if there is any fight left in them.

I will lie in bed with a cold,
Awake
And wanting to sleep,
Poking at myself from the inside.

I will do a mad dance.
I will stuff myself with flour and sugar.
I will eat like
There is no end, I won't wonder why.
I just won't know.

I will find myself.
I will understand.
I will love myself
Again.

I will let my head stay conceited.
I will let go of some things--
I can't handle not holding on.
The panic in my stomach wants to be filled.
Or perhaps filling up my stomach
Might shush it up
And I won't wonder anymore
What people think of me.

I won't be overcome by the irrational fear
That paralyzes me and traps me in the now
   with no hope of a future, ever.

I will be a mother and a wife.
I will be sane.

I will love myself.
And I will not mess
Anyone up.
I'm so depressed right now! The house is quiet. I'm all done with the semester and I "should" be happy right now. But I'm not! I WANT SUGAR!!!!! Could I be having withdrawal symptoms? I want sugar. Why can't I eat sugar? Why do leafy greens have to be so damn healthy? Leafy greens are boring! Dark green food and sprouts. Yummy yummy.

Yesterday was depressing. I went to the dermatologist and he said he wasn't too impressed. He gave me more crap to smear on my face--and he gave me a prescription for another drug. I don't want to take "another drug."

I want to find someone who can tell me what's wrong and help me! I'm sick of going to doctors. They never know what's wrong. He didn't ask me about my diet. He just looked at my skin. I want someone to tell me that there is hope! I'm sick of having to tell it to myself.

I want proof! I want to eat sugar. I want someone to tell me, or to help me figure out if sugar may be the cause of my skin problem. I keep telling myself that it is, and that I believe and have faith, but I want to know.

My skin is doing pretty good right now, considering how it has been. I have a boil on my cheek. That's about it. It seems like a boil to me. It developed an festered after my last sugar binge. Is there a connection? I need to remember that I can have sugar if I want it, but I'm choosing not to eat it. All this dietary change is up to me.

Variety is a wonderful thing. I can't have everything, of course. But geez. I deserve a little indulgence every now and then. Just not every day as I was getting in the habit of.
I am strong. I will prevail. I will not give up on my healthy diet. I will not go overboard either. This will all make sense in the end.

I just realized what's missing.

Good Job Jessica! You are doing a great job. You have improved your diet dramatically in the last few weeks. It will pay off. It is paying off. Good job this semester. You have done a great job balancing everything--play time, work time.

I just remembered why I write in this journal. To keep track of my life and my accomplishments! I take my successes for granted. I succeed every day. I am blessed with many successes. My piano playing ability has grown and strengthened extremely this semester. I am more in control of my voice than I have ever been.

All I do is punch myself. And through all the abuse I continue to move forward. Imagine how much more I would enjoy my life if I just quit beating myself up. I stop, right now. I will not beat myself up. I don't beat other people up. Why myself? I sense a new beginning. I sense tons of new beginnings.
I've been trying to do the "sugar-free thing." I laid off for three days and now I'm trying to get back into it. I'm going through the cravings again. I don't know how to go about quitting. There are so many pressures. Sugar is everywhere. I have been reading about food allergies too, and I wonder if I am allergic to wheat. Or cheese. Right now, I have no way of knowing.

I'm trying to change my habits, but I've lost 10 pounds and that scares me. I've eaten more fruits and vegetables in the past six weeks than I usually did in a year. Practically. Today I had oatmeal for breakfast, after which I came into my room and went back to sleep. Then I came home and had stir fry vegetables and almonds and sunflower seeds. I have been eating fruit in the morning but . . .

I've been reading a lot of different opinions. So far, it seems, variety of foods is important. Don't eat the same thing day after day. I can do variety. It is important, also, not to over-eat. I've been working on that because I do have a tendency to over-eat.

Really, the only kinds of foods I over-eat are foods with cheese, pastas, breads, and sweets. I don't over-eat vegetables, fruits, or meats. That makes me wonder. I need to cut out refined sugar altogether. I know I do. I know I can't handle it because trying to handle it is a problem for me. If I eat a little, I want to eat a lot. If I don't eat any, I want to eat a little, telling myself I won't eat a lot, but once I start, it is very hard to stop. Usually it takes going to sleep.

I think the whole idea is that we are way to hard on our stomachs and digestive systems, which means we are hard on our bodies. I read this stuff and I think--yes, I need to change--but then, after a sugarless day or two, I start to think, "Why?"

I see myself going through cycles of depression. It is hard, if not impossible for me to be happy when I wake up and happy when I go to bed. I can't imagine life like that.
I'm starting to think sugar may be a big cause of my mood shifts, but I don't know which is worse—life with mood shifts, or life without sugar. Since I don't know either, I don't always find the motivation within myself to stay away from candy.

Do I truly want to be happy? What would happen if I was truly happy? I wouldn't fit in with a lot of people around me. I don't know that I would fit in with my family. What might change if I was happy? I'm afraid I might lose a lot of me. But what is there to lose? My confusion? My lack of contentment? My inability to make decisions? My lack of motivation? I could stand to lose these things.
Boy, oh boy. I feel like crap today. But . . . well, never mind. No excuses. I feel like crap and that's that. It's not in my head. I'm not making it up. My stomach started hurting after I ate lunch. I suspect the Monterey Jack cheese. I haven't been eating much dairy products lately. Since I stopped, I realized how they linger when you eat them. I need to brush my teeth to get the taste out.

I am very skinny right now and that worries me. I only weigh 104 lbs. That's skinny. I'm boney. Bone-eeeee. And I'm worried. I can't go back to my old habits, yet these new ones haven't quite hit the mark. My face is doing much better. I'm trying to shift my attitude too. My goal is quite simple . . . to have a good enough complexion that I feel comfortable without make-up. I'm on my way there. I'm very close.

I'm not going to quit searching and accept just so-so skin because I want to be healthy. I don't want to be zitty all my life. But I don't want to be skin and bones either, so I don't know. I want to come up with some kind of system that works for me but I haven't quite found it yet.

I don't think it is necessary to stop enjoying food. I can't go that route, because food--good tasting food--is part of the joy of living. The fact is, though, I'm now realizing that my diet has never truly been healthy and I need to change so that I will start to feel better. I think the key is to just go with the faith that my body will heal itself. Since I can't remember ever having healthy skin, it's hard to have that faith, but I want to. So, I figure, if I start taking care of myself, especially in regards to what I eat, things are bound to improve.
I'm starting to confuse myself with all this new food information I've been reading. One thing I need to remember is that I need something--or I need to find something that works for me. Not some prescribed diet out of a book. Number two, I need to remember to slow down. I got in way over my head, and I just need to chill out about the whole food thing. I'm always in such a hurry because I feel like I have to get everything done now.

So far during this process of trying to transform my eating habits, I've learned that I am way too hard on myself. I wanted to figure out why I break out, and I'm starting to think one of the reasons may be that I don't know how to let go. I have to know the answer, and if I don't know, I beat myself over the head trying to find it which only makes my problems even worse.

I never knew sugar was bad for you until I started reading about it. I just knew it wasn't good, or that it didn't provide anything. Now I know and can make decisions according to that knowledge.

This change to a whole foods diet is going to be much more gradual than I wanted it to be. I wanted to be healed overnight, but the rewards won't come that quickly. My body has to re-adjust and that takes time, like it or not. What I need to do in the present is to make choices that are both healthy and enjoyable. I will do the best I can. That's all I can do.
January 7, 1997

Why can't I eat my cookies! This is going to be a lot harder then I thought. It's a lie. Sugar's not really all that bad for you.

What is this? The second day without a drop of sugar? I can take it. I can take it. This has to be the hardest part. I can't give in now! I just want sugar!

All I have to do is try it--give it a chance. If I don't feel better, if my face doesn't clear up, then I guess I'll just eat sugar again. But if I don't give it a chance . . . let's see . . . the month of January . . . then I'll never know will I? It doesn't have to be for an entire lifetime. Just one month. One month. I'm in the darkness right now. Struggling to see the light . . . but it will all make sense soon.

Okay. Here I go again, making myself miserable. I am being too hard on myself. Jessica, you are being way too hard on yourself. I don't have to prove myself, and I don't have to be a martyr. I am good enough just as I am.
January 14, 1997

I am suffering from weakness of the will today. I ate three chocolate chip cookies and two small Rice Krispie Treats. I just want to eat! I think I just want to eat. Die die die! Pimples pop out all over! I can't do this! I'm eating another cookie and I don't care. I am going to be a walking boil. So what.

Cookies! Cookies! Cookies. I feel like shit! Give me more cookies! My stomach hurts. I need more cookies! My life is nothing without sugar. I am nothing. I have nothing without my sweets.

Sugar sugar.
(What a weird word.)

I don't feel well. My head hurts. But you know what? I don't care. At least I'm eating my sugar. It's making me ill. I want to puke right now. When am I going to learn!? Ugh. One minute I have such determination. The next, I lose it all. I'm blinded by my cravings. Or by my unhappiness with the food I am eating. All my security is gone. My secure foods are gone and I'm left with cold, wet leafy greens and funny tasting sprouts and bland tofu and weird textured vegetables. Why why why! I can't stand it! Ahhhhhhhhh!

Why did I have to inherit an out of whack body chemistry? Why can't I just be happy and healthy? Why can't I have healthy cravings? Why did I have to grow up eating Lucky Charms and Skittles and generic Marsh pop and Bubbaliscious bubble gum and grease filled burgers and layers of gooey cheese and mounds of fine, bleached flour.
Sugared spaghetti sauce, sugared cereal, sugared peanut butter, sugared noodle mix, sugared cookies, cakes, sugared apple sauce. And zits. Oily zitty skin. Gee. I doubt if there is a connection. There's nothing I can do about my skin but smear more goop on it and hope it cooperates with me and if it doesn't--well, too bad--it's in your genes and there's nothing you can do about it. Blah. Blah, blah, blah!!!

Blah!

Oh my. And all the nutrients I had built up in my body these past days are being squandered by the sugar and refined foods I just ate. And there is nothing I can do but sit here and kick myself, depressed with my cravings wondering why I even bother to go against the grain because I'm just not strong enough! How many more times can I tell myself, No more sugar? How many times do I tell myself and then end up giving in?

Well . . . I will reset my goal. No more sugar tonight. And if I make it to tonight, no more sugar till tomorrow. No sugared food until Friday. Friday--if I want something--it's mine. Until then--none. I can eat anything else. But no sweets. No sweets till Friday.
A HEAVY BURDEN

I am
Not afraid.
Isn't that a silly name?

One day when I was walking through an intersection
I said to myself,
"I will never be depressed again"
And I think I was whistling.
I was imagining my future, the ease with which I would
glide through my days, the love that would
embrace me and follow me to bed, wake-up
with me, kiss me on the cheek in the afternoon.

What more is there
To a story such as this?
Except it was just a day and part of me wishes I could
say it was the end and it was a happy one.

I sigh onto the page

And it relieves
A heavy burden.
"It keeps me alive."
It isn't what I live for. Without it would I live? And if
life is so difficult, why do I live? Except that deep
down, I love the difficulty--even if I do not prevail.

That which I swear off,
The people I swear to hate--
Without them all, would I love to live?

And so I move on in my efforts for perfection...
Destroying all that is worthwhile?
It is an eternal question--
Along with--
Do I have anything profound to say?
I need a brownie. I need a brownie. _Dear God!_ I need a brownie.

*Just . . . one . . . brownie.*

I am not going to eat a brownie. I will not think about eating one of those brownies that is sitting in the aluminum baking pan on the kitchen cabinet.

_Dear Lord?_

Well. The dear Lord is not listening. It's all up to me, is it not. It's up to me to resist the brownies that are sitting in that aluminum pan in the kitchen just outside my door.

_One bite!_ Only one. Of course, I'll stop after one bite of one little brownie. One corner of one small brownie. And then it will be over and I will sleep soundly through the night. I won't eat it. _I will not_ eat a brownie. No no no. I will not eat _any_ sugar. No sugar. No sugar.

I . . . can feel . . . the back . . . of my throat . . . constricting . . . and my esophagus . . . rising . . . up. My chest is full of tears. If only I could heave and let them pour over . . . or eat one small bite of one small brownie. Then the tension would dissolve. The sweet taste would set my brain into an upward spin. A nice diversion . . . but short. Too short. The cravings will begin again. Just one _more_ brownie. One _more_ scoop of ice cream. One "last" cookie.

Grandma baked cookies. The smell warmed the kitchen. If our tiny stomachs had had mouths, they would have smiled. We knew the baked goodies would bring us pleasure. We would feel safe and happy and protected in their sugary arms.

How could sugar do harm? Mom wouldn't let me take a sucker from that nice man. We were walking to the car one summer, and he was standing on the other side of
the metal chain-link fence. He waved me over, stuck the sucker through a diamond opening and beckoned me with it. I walked over to him ready to pull off the wrapper and suck on its sweetness. What a kind man, my innocent mind exclaimed, but my mom jerked me away and shook her finger, No!


It is almost time for bed. Or at least, I have decided it will have to be time for bed soon because sleep is the only thing that will make this itching go away. There is a little man in my chest. He is tickling the insides of my lungs. I want-- No. I need to wash him down. I need to swallow him down. Water will only rinse off his dirty hat. And salted crackers are not weighty enough to break his hold.

I must sleep and hope that when I wake up, he will have let go, or dissolved. No. I will starve him out. That is what I will do. He will wither and die, and then I will swallow and vaporize his chalky bones with my saliva.

I can taste the chocolate now. The moist, smooth, sweet taste. The sugar, the flour, the pleasure.

It's me against the little man. He hangs on, poised with his head hanging back and his jaw unhinged. Who will win? Who will win this time...
Haw haw, you crazy girl.  
You are twisted by those books you read.  
Oh so trusting, so ready to believe.

Life is not simple; therefore,  
Simplistic answers should be shunned.  
You should pick them apart until you find exactly  
what's wrong with them and then discard them,  
my dear.  
They are of no use to you.  
No use.

Don't you know? God is complex; therefore,  
All life reflects that complexity.  
To say you have the answer  
Is like saying you are smarter than God!

Deary. None of us are smarter than God.  
None of us truly understands Him--  
He is, after all, so magnificent and complex.  
You spend your entire life time searching for Him  
But you never do find Him.

To say you do would be, why . . .  
Sinful I suppose.  
But anyway . . . I had a point . . .  
Oh yes.

It was--
Overlook those simple solutions. They can't be right.
If they were, we'd all be healthy!  
We can't all be healthy. Do you think you're special?  
That you've somehow figured it out?

Well, once you've figured it out, then, well, what's left?  
Death.  
If we were all healthy, I suppose we'd all be in heaven, then,  
And you know we aren't.
We're in this awful world that . . .
Well, that God created . . . and
Well . . . my point is . . .
. . . It's just that . . . . . . Well . . .

I challenge your notions! I say there is no joy in
moving forward. I say all joy lies in sitting here in my
safe spot, eating only foods that sweeten my palate
and plump me up. I say that's all there is to life and
to try and prove otherwise--

Quite frankly, I don't want to move.

I like where I'm sitting and I like how my butt has molded to
this chair. I like all the foods I eat and I don't want
to change. I have found happiness here and you say
I can't let go, but I say there's nothing more than this!
Nothing to get up for. Nothing to . . . nothing worth my
energy. I've been sitting here for so long-- It's all mine.
You hear me? Mine! I deserve it all! I've worked for
it. I'm saving it for me! For eternity! If I siphon it right,
I should have enough. Till the end of eternity--I'll have
enough! You wait and see!
Guess what. Yes. I just ate sugar. Big deal. No? It is a big deal. Respect yourself, Jessica. It is a big deal. It seems twisted and insane. It is twisted and insane. It's insane how people slowly destroy their bodies day by day and it is insane that I was unknowingly one of those people. I have a headache.

What is the prayer? God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Something like that. They use that saying in AA. Well, it would be a good saying to use in SA too. Sugarholics anonymous. I can't change the fact that I have difficulties staying away from sugar, but I do have the power to choose to stay away from it. It's my choice. The sooner I chose to stop eating sugar, the sooner I can get on the true road to "wellness."

Staying away from sugar is only the beginning. That alone won't keep me healthy and I know that. I need to exercise regularly and eat right too.

It's like potato chips. It's easier to just not eat the first one rather than eating one than trying to stop.

Healthy foods actually do taste good I've discovered. It's just a different kind of good. There is nothing to replace the overwhelming sweetness of sugar. Substitutes don't really work. It's just a matter of acquiring or coming to appreciate the taste of other foods.

I have come along way, but something tells me I'm barely beginning. I've hardly gotten started. Hmmm. Hmmm. Hmm.
April 3, 1997

I will end this sugar habit. I don't know how or when. I suspect it will just fizzle out. The more I read, the more I learn, the better cook I become. My body can't handle the stress of cold turkey. It doesn't work for me.

I have faith that something somewhere inside me will click and I will realize, Hey, I don't need sugar anymore. It will be a while. I need to take the focus off food. For my own good. For the good of my mind and my body.

Instead of focusing so much on the bad habits, I'll think of new better habits which will gradually overtake the old.

Like . . . writing in my journal. That is an important thing for me to do. Not to badger myself about what I'm not doing, but just to get things off my chest. I have faith that my body will restore itself to health . . . that includes my mind.
José reached a limit this afternoon.
He accepted paradise
    And named himself a rightful heir.
He felt temptation in his soul, judged it
    Decided it was good--but more bad
    Than good. Mostly deceptive.

It took more strength than he thought he could muster,
But he finally just said,
Enough of this, I'm stronger than you.
The temptation, that is.

All along he had known he needed to make a choice,
    To love or to die.
It would be easier to die.
But he's smart enough to know
That which seems easy often deceives.

Well. He has power now. Real power.

He chose faith over death.
Love will enter
When the pain subsides.
Faith will carry him through to that moment,
And then the life he thought about to end
Will finally
Begin.
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BOOKS ABOUT NUTRITION AND WELLNESS


BOOKS ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF RAW FOODS


COOKBOOKS


