



Why Diets Fail (Because You're Addicted to Sugar): Science Explains How to End Cravings, Lose Weight, and Get Healthy

Nicole M. Avena

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A food addiction expert reveals definitive proof that sugar is addictive, and presents the first science-based plan to cut out the sugar, stop the cravings that cause most diets to eventually fail, and lose weight--permanently.

Most diets work for a while...but there usually comes a point when the dieter can't maintain the strict dietary changes required to lose additional pounds or keep the weight off. Why? Because cravings take over and, as with cigarettes or drugs, the pull becomes too strong to resist. In *Why Diets Fail*, Dr. Nicole M. Avena explains that sugar addiction underlies those cravings and shares a revolutionary plan for going sugar-free and sticking to the diet during the make-or-break withdrawal period. Dr. Avena's easy-to-use sugar table expresses the amount of sugar in 600+ common foods so dieters know precisely what to eat and what to avoid, and co-author John Talbott shares his personal story (and tips for success) about quitting sugar and losing 50 pounds along with his cravings for nicotine and alcohol.

Why Diets Fail (Because You're Addicted to Sugar): Science Explains How to End Cravings, Lose Weight, and Get Healthy Details

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From Reader Review Why Diets Fail (Because You're Addicted to Sugar): Science Explains How to End Cravings, Lose Weight, and Get Healthy for online ebook

Michelle says

Very disappointing. I'm open to considering the possibility of using "addiction" as a way to look at what high sugar consumption does to the brain, but this book did a poor job of explaining it. fMRI imaging and saying things like "can overlap with areas that are activated in drug use" just doesn't give us much info or much reason for the other, emphatic statements in the book (and on the cover!) And THEN the authors do a crazy bait-and-switch, telling us how much sugar is bad, how awful drinking a Coke is, and then suddenly tacking on "and other carbohydrates." This eating plan is very, very, very carbohydrate-restrictive, and we are given NO good reasons or evidence why brown rice is as bad as a Twinkie. None. But we have to get rid of it, totally, anyway? The book CLAIMS it has "vegetarian" options, but that consists of ONE page--about 3/4 of a page, actually. And I'm VEGAN. Basically on this plan I could eat spinach. Broccoli. That's about it. Crazy. It tells a few anecdotes, especially one of the co-authors, who did this and lost tons of weight, but I'm unconvinced this will help me avoid heart disease, colon cancer and other hereditary problems I may be subject to. Not a good job at all.

Donnna Paglianio says

First, let me advise that I am a former research grad student of Princeton University and heard about the author Dr. Avena while she was discovering many of the actual scientific explanations written about in this book at Princeton dating back to 2001-2002.

After reading this book I was glad to have finally read one whose author has actually done the scientific research to justify their claims which can be found in many scientific journals for those of you who reviewed this book and claim to be students of nutrition, etc.

Thankfully she wrote this book to appeal to the less scientific-minded individual (which includes 98% of the population) and I think that was achieved.

Additionally when reading some of the bizarre reviews of this book I couldn't help but think that people are prone to believe, and now consider experts, individuals who read others papers and research and include them in their books.

It's like writing about how someone else would fix your car and claiming you were a mechanic. Or writing about how to properly fly a plane when you've never flown one. That's the correlation I get and find completely unnerving that science is superseded by journalism and theory.

Great book and hope there is more to come from authors with actual scientific and medical research backgrounds.

Laine Bergeson says

I'm really interested in sugar addiction, so I had high hopes for this book. But it's just "meh." While they get the science right, they don't offer a lot of helpful advice (at least in my opinion) about kicking the sugar habit. Basically they just keep repeating "Cutting out sugar is hard. Cutting out sugar is hard." Not to sound

like a teenager in the early-90s, but no duh. If you're interested in food and specifically the dangers of sugar, stick with Gary Taubes.

Reasonable says

I am not a nutritional scientist, but while reading the book I got the feeling that some bold claims about *sugar addiction* might be exaggerated. This is not to say that the book has no merits. In fact, I believe this style of writing might be more effective for some people to get off bad eating habits. To kick sugar out of your diet completely is unrealistic, but it certainly helps to be more conscious of the amounts we are *unknowingly* using every day. An excellent point mentioned by the authors was the danger of black and white thinking. This following line typifies the problem.

" Forget it! I just cheated and messed up my diet. I might as well eat the whole bag now. "

The authors rightly assert that it is this kind of black and white, guilt-ridden attitude towards the much common diet slip-ups which leads people to abandon it completely. "Better lose the saddle than the horse" is an apt English saying here. ***It's better to stop and accept a small loss than to stop trying altogether .***

While reading the book, I've highlighted some lines. Here are a few short ones:

"Make your goals Short-Term."

"Exercise, minimize stress, and eat right."

"Diet should refer to the way you eat, now and Forever."

"Draw your happiness from an activity Other than eating."

"Maybe you used sugary foods or drinks to alleviate emotions that were difficult to sit with."

"The first few minutes of exercise can seem the hardest to get through. Once you start moving and endorphins start flowing, you feel good."

Marc says

Great books for those who suffer from sugar addiction, think they may suffer from sugar addiction, or are just want to find out more about the topic. It covers not only the practical side but also the biological and scientific side of sugar addiction. I definitely recommend it.

Anna says

No help at all. I've had much better luck with books talking about addiction in general. Stop eating sweets and simple carbohydrates? Oh really? I surely had no idea before you've enlightened me. Of course I've never tried that before - why, the idea never came into my mind! And it's so easy to do, too - you just need to hear it from the author and then bingo, you've stopped, you're happy and thin.

Urrgh. I pity the time wasted on reading that piece of rubbish.

Marian la Contrarian says

I was skeptical about this book at first. The first couple of chapters sounded a bit condescending and I doubted I was going to read anything that wasn't already obvious to me. I had already come to the book with a pretty good sense of the power sugar can have, and I was afraid the book would just keep asserting that without adding much more.

But the following chapters were all highly useful. It actually did make a difference to me to know, not just that sugar can be addictive, but how that works. This knowledge helped me realize that the process of eating sugar for me is way different than the process of eating other foods, which I don't crave or binge on. The desire for sugar, as these authors explain, comes out of a whole different part of your brain than normal hunger for food, and this fact alone helps you to think about the problem with sugar differently.

Which is why this really isn't just a diet book. (If it was, I wouldn't be reading it, as I don't have any interest in losing weight.) It's about eating to be healthy by eating what your body needs rather than what your brain wants. There are several strategies in the book to help you do this that come out of addiction science rather than the diet industry, which is what makes this book unique and helpful to more than just dieters.

I have already come a long way in decreasing my dependence on sugar. For instance, I'm past the cycle of using sugar to get energy, having a sugar crash, and then eating more sugar to get rid of the sugar crash feeling. If you're stuck in that cycle, I think this book would be very helpful, but even if you're beyond it and just dealing with the occasional craving or temptation at a party, it has some useful strategies and will help your awareness about what's going on.

There seem to be two criticisms of this book. First, that by including other carbohydrates, really this isn't about sugar and is just another low-carb diet. In fact, the authors break down sugar into a few different levels (which also roughly form the order in which they suggest you wean yourself off sugar): (1) added sugar, like table sugar, high fructose corn syrup, etc., which are simple carbohydrates, and (2) complex carbohydrates, like bread, pasta, cereal, and rice. The authors acknowledge that this is a very general distinction, and that there are levels of each thing (for instance, the more whole grain you have, the longer it will take to break down, but it still breaks down into sugar, maybe with a little fiber on the side). But the point is that we don't just become addicted to table sugar; we also become addicted to carbohydrates like bread that don't taste sweet for exactly the same reason: because they both function as sugar in our body and the response mechanism in our brain is the same. If you don't binge on unsweetened carbs, then great, don't worry about that part. But I know from personal experience that a loaf of completely unsweetened bread can be just as compelling to me as cake, and I'll binge on it the same way. On the other hand, I'm not all that worried about the sugar in fruits and vegetables, which the authors also give information on, because I don't tend to binge on these. It's all about knowing yourself and your tendencies, as the authors acknowledge. You can then use the information in this book to be intentional about your food choices in the way that you feel is best. The authors are simply giving you a comprehensive view.

The second criticism is that if you don't eat carbs, there's nothing left. If you believe this, have a look at the paleo diet. Again, I'm not saying paleo is the best diet or the way for everyone, but a book like *It Starts with Food* will at least show you a new way to think about your food options. There are more than you think. What I like about *Why Diets Fail* is that it takes into account that it might be hard for folks to switch their diet precisely because things like rice, pasta, and bread form a big part of what they eat. The gradual process

outlined will help you adapt.

At the end of the day, no one's telling you to do anything. But if you want to learn more about yourself, feel better, and gain a sense of control over this aspect of your life, I think this book is a great tool.

Amanda says

This is a good book explaining the science of sugar & starch addiction, how to go through withdrawal, different techniques for reducing sugar intake (cold turkey vs. moderation, etc.), recommitment after relapses, navigating social and societal pressures to eat sugars, and ideas for maintenance. I like that it's not solely focused on weight loss but also on health, though be warned that weight loss and dieting are definitely (and probably pretty obviously) an emphasis. I like that it's not a narrow "eat on this plan" sort of diet book, because those are always pointless to me. I don't need new recipes — I need to know how the foods I already eat fit in (or don't, or can be modified) with the overarching plan, and this book does a good job of explaining that.

I appreciated the no-nonsense, tough-love approach. You can tell the author is science-minded and not trying to sell you something. I hate diet books that read like infomercials; this one is just straightforward.

One helpful feature in the appendix is a list of foods (including name-brand and fast foods) and their sugar equivalency (0-100). It makes it pretty easy to see at a glance which foods are low in sugars (e.g., meats, vegetables, dairy) and which aren't (e.g., grains, cereals, desserts — duh) and can help you make smarter choices in in-between categories such as fruits and nuts. I'd have liked more guidance than the book gave (0-5 ok, 5-10 restrict, 10+ greatly restrict or avoid) on how to choose mid-level foods from the chart. For instance, is there a suggested daily limit of 5-10 foods or weekly limit of 10+ foods? You're supposed to be able to download the table from the site ([whydietsfailbook . com](http://whydietsfailbook.com)), but I don't see it there — maybe it was recently redesigned. I'm going to look for a similar phone app, because that would be handy when out and about if I have questions about foods.

Maggie says

So many thoughts about this book. I should preface this review by saying that I am a Nutritional Sciences graduate student so I come at this book a little differently than many people. I don't have my degree yet though so I'm simply writing my review of this based on what I've learned so far and my own experiences.

I am a big believer that added sugars are the biggest dietary problem in American today so I was excited to read this book. I went into it thinking that it referred to added sugars, but was disappointed to find that that wasn't the case. In the end this is simple another low-carb diet marketing itself under the in-vogue hatred of added sugars. Not to mention that this book often uses the term "sugar" to encompass all carbohydrates which often left me shaking my head in confusion.

But let's get into some of the nitty gritty points here. First, let's talk about what I liked about the book. I liked that it was written by someone who successfully lost weight using this plan and a trained medical professional. I liked their timeline for implementing their plan. There's a suggested amount of time for each of the steps, but the plan encourages you to use your own judgement and take more time if you feel you are

struggling. And I liked how they marketed it as a complete lifestyle change rather than a diet and their tips for maintaining the weight loss, sticking to the plan, and how to recover if you fall off the wagon. All of those tips were reasonable and could apply to any type of dietary change.

Second, we'll move on to what I didn't like. I completely believe the science behind people being addicted to food, especially foods with so much sugar. But I question how many people have such an extreme addiction to sugar that they need to give up pretty much all carbohydrates. My gut tells me that it's a very small percentage of the population. Additionally throughout the book they talk about people who are addicted and people who've had success implementing the plan, but who are these people? In the back there are two blogs by former "food addicts" and if that's who they're referring to I'm kind of appalled. As for their success rate as someone who's used to reading peer reviewed studies I get that this is different, but I still would have liked to have heard more about it.

One of their arguments is that leptin and insulin (two digestive hormones) interact with the same area of the brain as dopamine (a neurotransmitter connected to pleasure and things like drug addiction). When people gain weight the body becomes resistant to the messages leptin and insulin send the brain meaning you don't get the same sense of fullness you normally would. I didn't quite understand their argument since if your brain is resistant to leptin and insulin why does it matter if it's the same being affected as dopamine? But, they didn't go into a lot of detail, probably because it's not important to the layperson, so perhaps I'm just not getting the full picture.

But the bottom line to me, while reading, is would I ever want to follow this diet or recommend it to a client? My answer is a resounding no. Why? First, until I see research telling me otherwise I don't believe such drastic measures are necessary for a large percentage of the population. In my opinion the average person would be alienated and ultimately set themselves up for failure by trying to stick to such an extremely limited plan. Second, after reading the entire book I still don't understand what I would eat. As someone who eats a healthy, well rounded diet I understand that this book isn't aimed at me, but sometimes I eat too much sugar, especially coming off the holiday season, so I wouldn't mind cutting back, but they gave one example of a meal plan and it didn't sound too appetizing. Not to mention for someone who doesn't like to eat a lot of meat the options are extremely limited. Third, I just don't see this as being feasible for most people. The average person, single or married, with kids or without, doesn't have a lot of time and this plan to me screams time consuming. I do think eating healthy takes time and effort, but not in this extreme of a way.

By far the worst part of this book to me was when a chapter opened with a Gwyneth Paltrow quote! A Gwyneth Paltrow quote! Seriously? You want me to take your science book seriously and you're quoting Gwyneth Paltrow? In my head I joked that they could have at least picked a celebrity who struggled with their weight. Then a few chapter later they opened with a Carnie Wilson quote and that wasn't any better. So basically no celebrity quotes in science books any more. Please.

I received an electronic review copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley. All opinions are my own.

Runwright says

Spoiler alert:

Why do diets fail? Because diets are generally periods of restricted eating. Because we have developed addictive behaviors in how we relate to food. Because we treat our discomforts by eating. Because the foods we tend to like and thus eat a lot of, aren't good for us but the foods that are good for us don't inspire the

same kinds of food urges.

I liked the premise of the book but the practical applications - the recommended foods, I didn't agree with. Basically, this book prescribes a Paleo-type diet, which I think is healthy but I don't agree with the heavy emphasis on meat and dairy that it suggests. I saw a lot of cheese and milk in the recommendations, I saw kidney beans appear on a list of foods to eat with moderation.

So I had some mixed feelings about this book and the practical tips didn't really work for me.

3/5 stars

James Carter says

Why *Diets Fail* is not really about why diets fail but is another diet book.

Basically, as I am going to save you the time of reading the book, you cut out most sugar and carbs out of your diet and stick with a high protein diet with lots of fruits and vegetables. The rest of the book is a lot of blah blah.

You know, it sounds great and all that, but I am sure this leads to high cholesterol because of meat and poultry. So, there is absolutely no way I am going to live my life not eating bread, pasta, waffles, etc. and drinking orange juice, chocolate milk, etc. Food is meant to be enjoyed. There is nothing wrong with indulging desserts every now and then.

I have 100/60 blood pressure to prove it with 55 hbpr at rest, and my weight is absolutely normal for my height. It's just that being active and doing things are the keys to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Eating in moderation is another.

As a matter of fact, water is my beverage of choice, and I haven't drunk a can of soda in 20 years. However, I can find the prescribed low sugar/carb diet plan acceptable for somebody who is obese and wants to lose weight until the number that he is comfortable with and maintains it with normal eating habits.

All in all, I am sorry, but I am not believing it for myself.

Alesa says

I have struggled with sugar in my diet for decades. Several times, I've been able to kick the habit completely, often for months at a time. But somehow, sugar insidiously sneaks back in -- sometimes because of social pressure (holiday eating), but more frequently lately due to a heavy travel schedule. I've often wondered why I can't eat just one cookie and be satisfied. It's like once the floodgates open, kapowee. I'm trapped again.

This book explains why and how sugar is addictive -- not just emotionally, but also biologically. The authors give scientific evidence proving why it's so hard to get off sugar, and how sugar is found in so many of our modern foods.

Admittedly, a lot of the information in the book is not new, especially if you've been reading about nutrition for years. However, the addiction slant is really helpful. It makes an excellent companion book to such classics as Daniel Amen's work (Change Your Brain, Change Your Life), Magic Foods, and Sugar Blues.

I respected this book so much that as soon as I finished it, I immediately bought a copy of his previous book about Survival Investing for my Kindle.

Janet says

I thought that this book was more focused on carbohydrate restriction than on breaking sugar addictions. I got the message that quitting sugar is hard, but I wanted more solutions to breaking the cycle. Perhaps I was again looking for the easy solution. In fact there is no easy way to lose weight. Other diets have proven that carb restriction usually suppresses cravings and the weight loss and health benefits have been widely publicized. I just didn't see much new in this approach. It wasn't badly written, didn't talk down to the reader, but just go in aware that carb restriction is the end goal.

*I received my copy from NetGalley.com in exchange for an honest review.

Katarina says

Everybody should read this book.

it felt like the book was written for me personally, and I know many readers will identify with it.

The ideas and premise of the book made such sense and prompted me to make significant changes in my life. It's been a week since I finished the book and I have significantly decreased my sugar intake while increasing fruit and vegetable intake. And I can already tell the difference. It's not going to be easy to wean myself off the sugar and junk food completely, but with this book I have the tools and the motivation to continue.

Cristina says

Provided not more information than what you kind find on sugar addition on the internet. Mixed messages on foods on the sugar index--some were recommended when didn't fall within low scale with no explanation. Also, not realistic recommendations for vegetarians.
