

JJ VIRGIN's
**SUGAR
IMPACT
DIET**

JJ VIRGIN INTERVIEW FOR *THE SUGAR IMPACT DIET*

How does The Sugar Impact Diet differ from other low-sugar diets?

Unlike other plans, *The Sugar Impact Diet* isn't about eliminating sugar altogether; it's about eating the *right* sugar. Other programs look at one aspect of sugar impact, such as glycemic index or nutrient density. Or they do something crazy like pull you off sugar cold turkey. I've looked at the bigger picture to develop a step-by-step process to wean you off the foods with the highest and most damaging sugars. Gradually tapering gives you the fat-loss and optimal-health results you want without deprivation or withdrawal. It's a win-win!

Why gradually taper off sugar rather than completely eliminate it at the beginning?

I designed the three cycles to help people taper Sugar Impact and transition from high to medium to low Sugar Impact foods— slowly. You're not going cold turkey! Ever. I know that's conventional wisdom in certain diet circles, but how's that worked for you so far? Exactly. There are a few things I can guarantee going cold turkey will do for you, and losing weight isn't one of them. Instead, you'll be shaky, irritable, lethargic, starving, and craving sugar— not the outcome we're after.

Our bodies run on glucose, so what's wrong with getting a little bit of sugar in our diet?

The average person eats a whopping 22 teaspoons of *added* sugars daily. According to Dr. Mark Hyman, the average American eats 152 pounds of sugar and 146 pounds of flour (which converts to sugar) every year. These sugars often arrive hidden and in sneaky sources like green tea, salad dressings, and sundried tomatoes; in other words, "healthy" foods. Those sneaky sugars take a huge toll on your health and your waistline.

The Sugar Impact Diet isn't a *no-sugar* diet. The copious fruits, vegetables, and other plant foods you'll incorporate into the plan all contain some natural sugar, which prevents blood sugar from dropping too low but also prevents it from going too *high*.

Why can't I just enjoy everything in moderation? I mean, that occasional piece of chocolate cake isn't going to hurt me, right?

I think this might be the biggest fat-loss cliché *ever*. It drives me nuts because for most people, it doesn't work. The reality is moderation is a slippery slope, because so often people really believe they can have just one cookie. Moderation makes you fat, sets you up for cravings, creates or exacerbates food intolerances, and ignores the serious damage high-sugar foods (especially high-fructose corn syrup) can create.

What *The Sugar Impact Diet* ultimately does is help you better appreciate sweetness. Suddenly, you taste the

natural sweetness of slow roasted almonds or blueberries. Once you get your taste buds under control, you might choose to occasionally indulge in something sweet, but you might be surprised that you choose *not* to.

I'm confused why you would reduce or eliminate certain foods. I mean, I thought apples were healthy? And then other foods that are higher in carbs, like quinoa, land in the "green light" category.

Remember that I look at a food's *overall* sugar impact. Fiber and nutrient density both affect that sugar impact, and total sugar isn't the only factor when I rank a food.

Certain fruits we're told to eat every day—like apples—can actually be some of the worst offenders for sneaking more sugar into your diet than you ever imagined, especially because you're probably giving yourself a pass to eat up. Certain fruits, like apples and pears, have significantly more fructose than glucose—in fact, *twice* as much, which is why I put them into the medium Sugar Impact category.

Quinoa, on the other hand, comes loaded with nutrients, fiber, and protein that provide slow sustained energy, putting it into the low Sugar Impact category.

Isn't this just another variation of a low-carb diet?

No. It's a low-sugar diet. I designed *The Sugar Impact Diet* so you wouldn't need to count carbs, fat, calories, or anything. You simply transition from higher impact to medium impact and then low impact foods with the easy-to-follow lists I provide.

If you're a math person, I do provide some numbers in Cycles 2 and 3, but you needn't count anything on this plan. Simply eat from the list of approved foods and gradually remove higher Sugar Impact foods!

Let's say I'm at a party and want some finger foods. What do I replace my bread, crackers, and wraps with? I love crunch!

I've provided numerous easy lateral shifts, or healthier swaps, in *The Sugar Impact Diet*.

Swap your chips for kale chips. Slow roasted or dehydrated nuts and seeds provide nutrient-rich alternatives to the crunch of chips. Gluten-free rice wraps or coconut wraps can become healthier stand-ins for bread and wheat wraps. Once you get the hang of it, nearly any food can become a lateral shift.

We hear a lot about healthy sugars like honey and maple syrup. How do those play a role in *The Sugar Impact Diet*?

No matter what source the sugar you eat comes from—whether it's high-fructose corn syrup, honey, or molasses—your body is going to break that sugar down to glucose or fructose. In other words, sugar is ultimately sugar to your body, no matter what its source.

That said, some sweeteners like real, unprocessed honey or maple syrup (not the stuff you find in grocery stores) do have some nutrients intact. Just don't kid yourself: it's still mostly sugar.

I wrote Huffington Post blogs discussing [agave](#), [coconut sugar](#), and [honey](#). The latter two have some health benefits, but these are not more-is-better sweeteners.

So what are the best sweeteners if we use sugar?

I like pure monk fruit (Lo han), stevia, glycine, or erythritol, or some combination of these natural sweeteners. Monk fruit or erythritol are fine for baking, but keep stevia for your coffee or tea.

You've got to read your labels when you buy these sweeteners. They should be *pure* and not contain dextrose (sugar), maltodextrin (corn), natural flavors (who even knows what those are), and other additives. Silicon dioxide is sometimes added to prevent caking. Otherwise, the sweetener should contain no additives.

I wrote a blog describing the health benefits of these natural sweeteners [here](#).

One thing I noticed is that you recommend full fat dairy. With all those calories, wouldn't it make more sense to switch to low-fat?

Fueled by the dairy industry and the woefully outdated low-fat craze, we've been led to believe low-fat and fat-free dairy are healthiest. If you don't believe me, witness the vast array of low-fat yogurt, "lite" ice cream, and skim milk lining your grocery shelves.

When the fat is pulled out of dairy, both the flavor and that food's ability to make you feel full and satisfied are yanked, too. Plus, without the fat, guess what's left? You guessed it—the sugar! That's why skim milk is especially wicked. Ever notice you can eat three little containers of those low-fat fruit-on-the-bottom yogurts without feeling satisfied? Now you know why.

Full-fat dairy contains healthy fatty acids like conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), which can actually help you *burn* fat. Kind of ironic that people eat tasteless fat-free stuff to lose weight when the full-fat stuff actually helps you burn fat, huh?

Quality matters. If you're not dairy sensitive, look for raw, grass-fed, fermented, and/ or organic *full-fat* dairy whenever possible and skip the low-fat and fat-free stuff.

Another thing I noticed that you restrict balsamic vinegar. I thought that was healthy?

Balsamic vinegar comes in two varieties: the real deal and the get-it-on-the-shelf-fast kind.

Authentic, traditional balsamic vinegar has been made in Italy for hundreds of years. It takes years to come to market and undergoes rigorous testing before it does.

Big food companies aren't going to endure a 12-year production process to get a product in stores. So they accelerate its journey to the shelf with highly processed manufacturing, supplying you with something called "condiment balsamic vinegar," modeled after the good stuff. This vinegar we know as balsamic is usually made from white wine vinegar and has caramel coloring (for color *and* added sweetness) and thickeners like cornstarch and gum, all of which add sugar and calories.

The condiment balsamic vinegar is the stuff we get in salad dressings, sauces, dips, and marinades. It can have as many as four times the number of calories in a cup as regular cider vinegar!

You have a fitness background, yet you don't talk much about exercise in *The Sugar Impact Diet*.

If you want to lose weight, don't focus on exercise. You read that correctly.

Believe me, no one is more pro-exercise than me. I'm not telling you *not* to exercise . . . Far from it. But I don't emphasize exercise until you've gotten your diet totally under control. Otherwise, you're hit with information overload, and when you're overwhelmed you can't do anything at all.

Exercise is one of my strategies for sugar withdrawal. It can provide the endorphin boost you were looking for in the cookie jar, and it's also great for speed healing because it helps quickly restore insulin sensitivity in the muscles. It's critical for long-term weight management because it helps burn up your fat-storing enzymes, and it boosts your metabolism so you burn more calories from fat throughout the day.

In the first few cycles, though, I want you to master what you put on your fork before you tackle exercise.

I'm not a big drinker, but I like my occasional glass of wine with dinner. Do I need to give that up on *The Sugar Impact Diet*?

Never fear: *The Sugar Impact Diet* will not take away your wine. (Personally, I would never do a diet or create one that took away mine for the long term!).

Alcohol isn't sugar, but its fate is nearly the same. Fermentation of fruit and grains creates alcohol. During the fermentation process, enzymes gobble up the sugars. Wine doesn't have residual sugars, though some of the cheaper wines or sweeter wines do, which is why quality matters.

I label dry red or white wine in the medium Sugar Impact group, which makes it OK in Cycles 1 and 3 but not Cycle 2. Just be aware any time you drink alcohol, you potentially shut down your fat-burning machinery, so proceed accordingly.

Even though you gradually taper off sugar on this plan, many people may experience cravings. Let's say you've done everything correctly yet you still get cravings. How do you handle them?

The most important thing is to make sure you're doing your meals correctly. Attack any issues with your appetite head-on by increasing your protein and fat and the amount of fiber at every meal. If you do dinner

at 7 p.m. and have cravings at 11 p.m., you either didn't get enough protein, fiber, and fat or you didn't eat enough.

Even if you've done everything right, you may still find yourself gnashing your teeth, completely preoccupied with food, and scrambling for some fast relief. If water doesn't do the job, try tossing 5 to 10 grams of fiber powder into a glass of water. If that doesn't work, you can do half a protein shake before bed.

Beyond protein, some of my favorite crave-busters include one to three grams of glutamine powder, Lemon-Aid, and 100 – 300 mg of 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) to boost serotonin levels.

You're also journaling daily, so any time you hit a serious craving, really go back and see what you potentially did incorrectly at your last meal.

Is *The Sugar Impact Diet* vegetarian or vegan friendly?

Totally. *The Sugar Impact Diet* is agnostic, meaning it works whether you're vegan, vegetarian, Paleo, or anything in-between.

For vegans and vegetarian, the challenge becomes getting enough protein without overdosing on carbs or fat. Ideally you'll get the protein you need by combining nuts and seeds with gluten-free grains and legumes.

I've developed an easy-to-follow Sugar Impact Plate for vegans and vegetarians that provides 20 – 30 grams of protein at every meal. Vegan protein powder is also an easy way to get optimal protein at one of your meals.

What's your ultimate goal with *The Sugar Impact Diet*?

To start a sugar revolution and really wake people up about sneaky sugars! I want to provide the tools to drop seven high Sugar Impact foods to help people break free of sugar addiction.

I've had people follow this program and lost 10 pounds in just two weeks. They reversed inflammation and bloating, eliminated symptoms we're all told to believe are the normal signs of aging, and felt better than they have in years.

For the first time these people realized how hidden sugars held their health hostage, and *The Sugar Impact Diet* provided the strategies they needed to loosen its grip gradually, without withdrawal or any of the other symptoms completely eliminating sugar at once could create.