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# Sugar-Free Living: Eve Schaub's "Year of No Sugar"

Could your family give up sugar for a year?

Eve Schaub and her family did, and she tells the story of their journey in her memoir, "Year of No Sugar."

And the book isn't just about high-fructose corn syrup. From Dr. Robert Lustig and his YouTube video "Sugar: The Bitter Truth," Schaub learned about the dangers of regular fructose, which is in all sugar. According to Lustig, fructose not only makes you fat but also is linked to disease: heart disease, diabetes, etc. So, Schaub decided her family would spend a year avoiding added and refined sugar altogether, with just a few exceptions for birthdays, etc.

Along the way, she became an expert label reader, found creative ways for her family to have dessert (banana "ice cream," anyone?), and strategized on how she and her daughter could get through a weekend retreat while keeping their diet. Through her funny and down-to-earth observations, she draws attention to the sugar that's hidden in our everyday foods and the role that sugar plays in our lives.

Make It Better talked to Schaub about what she learned and how she started feeling better as a result of her no-sugar diet.

**Make It Better:** What was the most unexpected thing that you learned during your year without sugar?

**Schaub:** I learned so many different things. One thing that surprised me was how noticeable our project was when we went out and engaged in social activities. I knew that was going to be a part of it, but I was amazed.

It wasn't just the logistics, but also the metaphorical place of food in our culture: how we use it to stand in for things, to mark occasions, to express certain emotions. That took me by surprise.

**What was the biggest struggle?**

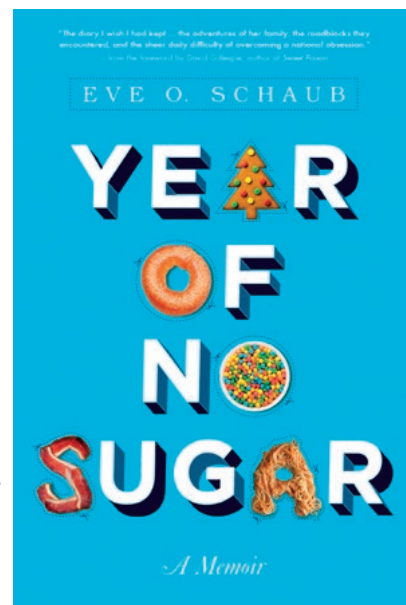
The social component was a struggle, and so was the beginning. That's when we had to do a lot of research and learn a lot. When I went to the grocery store, I felt like I needed a magnifying glass and a dictionary. Even when I had done my research, I still wasn't always clear; I had to ask experts. There was a big learning curve. But after that, things became very easy.

**You write about how your daughters' school absences dropped, compared to the year before, during the project. What were the long-term results for you?**

I've always struggled with having enough energy—to the point where I've been tested for anemia, etc. I didn't think that problem could be solved by not eating added sugar, but it was! I basically don't have energy problems anymore. It was a subtle change over the course of time.

Then there was, for all of us, just losing the taste for sugar. The biological craving for sugar goes away fairly quickly, like in two or three weeks. But then there's that emotional craving for sugar, which can be hard to distinguish from the biological craving. The emotional craving was harder to deal with.

**What's your advice for families that want to reduce their sugar intake?**



My first piece of advice is stop drinking sugar. In the American diet, drinks are such a pervasive source of added sugar that you can cut down a tremendous amount just by being mindful of sugar in our beverages and avoiding it. Avoid sports drinks, sweetened teas, and, of course, fruit juice. Stick with milk, water, sparkling water, unsweetened coffees and teas. A dry wine, you're safe, because all of that fructose from fruit has been fermented and turned into alcohol. You have to worry about a different poison, then, but not fructose.

Secondly, be wary of things that are "healthy." Always read ingredients. Once you get used to doing it, it will become second nature and you will learn all the different aliases for sugar and be surprised. It's often listed more than once in ingredients lists.

Get kids involved in the process, whether it's planting a small garden or bringing them with you to the supermarket and getting them involved in the cooking. It made them feel invested in what we were doing, and it made it fun.

At one point you write that you were concerned about your girls, then ages 6 and 11, developing eating disorders as a result of the project. How did you help them keep the project in perspective?

We didn't emphasize numbers at all. There were no before-and-after pictures, before-and-after blood work, or weigh-ins. We made a point of saying that this isn't about numbers, but about how we're feeling and being aware of what's in our food supply.

People are sometimes disappointed when I don't haul out the blood work, but for me that was not where we wanted to go with this. Luckily, none of us were really in need of losing any weight. People see my book and think it's the next new diet plan, but really, nothing could be further from the truth. It's about being aware of what's in our food supply and making our own decisions from there.

Fruit juice is a major villain in the book. Is it really terrible to have a glass of OJ when you're sick?

It's a sliding scale. Yes, orange juice has vitamin C in it. But it's not as good for you as if you were drinking it with lots of pulp, so you're getting the fiber. And that's not as good as if you just sat down and ate an orange. We spray fruit juice into our food supply and then say, "Look, look, it's healthy, it has fruit juice in it!" But it's actually not any healthier for you in that form than any of the other added sugars.

Dr. Lustig talks about juicing and smoothies in his book, "Fat Chance," which I highly recommend. He basically says, "I wish I could endorse this, but I can't, because you really should just eat the fruit or the vegetable." In terms of the whole juice craze, vegetables are not as problematic as fruits.

The problem is, we have this cultural agreement that certain things are healthy: like yogurt, granola bars and salads with lots of dressing. They could be healthy things, but we've changed them. A yogurt, if it's not plain, has lots of sugar in it. A granola bar is likely to have as much added sugar in it as a candy bar, if not more. You can make salad dressing at home without sugar, but try finding it at the grocery store. Try finding it in those little packets they give you in a cafeteria. It's near impossible.

So, what are you eating now?

We're pretty much where we left off at the end of the book. I'm stubborn and I refuse to buy products with added sugar in them, so I seek out the same products I like. We do have the occasional treat. It's rare and small. If we're celebrating at a restaurant, we'll order one small dessert and share it, and we'll each have a couple of bites. The first couple of bites of a dessert are always the best anyway.

At home, I don't use sugar really, except for special occasions. My older daughter just turned 14 and she asked me to make her my grandma's chocolate cake, which is in the book. She qualified it by saying she wanted real sugar. It's her birthday, so I said OK. In past years, I made this cake and we all devoured it. This year, the leftover cake just sat in the fridge. Nobody ever went back to have more. One serving was good.

Are you still using sugar substitutes, like dextrose?

I still use dextrose (a natural sugar substitute made from corn that contains only glucose), but it can be hard to find, so I still do experiments with other things, like mashed fruit and sweet potato. I still love making bread with brown rice syrup or barley malt syrup, which can both be found in most health food stores. Barley malt syrup is a great substitute for anything that calls for molasses or honey.

And your next book is going to be about clutter?

Yes. I'm the kind of person where, I look perfectly normal, but I've got "a room"! The door is always shut. I'm interested in finding out why for some but not all of us it's so hard to deal with our stuff. I'm going to de-clutter and rescue my room, and hopefully in the process I'll figure some things out. I've started seeing a lot of parallels between this project and the no-sugar project. These are problems of excess, problems we're lucky to have.