

Fill your plate to Lose Weight
By Sari N. Harrar
Prevention

Saundra Snow knew she had put on some weight. But in the fall of 2005, the 33-year-old was most concerned about her lack of energy. Snow was so tired after work that she couldn't get off the couch to walk her dogs, Daisy and Nacho. She had chronic headaches and occasional dizziness, couldn't remember when she'd last had a period and was depressed. Her husband was starting to worry. "You're breathing too hard," he told her one day as they walked up the three flights to the St. Meinrad, Ind., catalog company where they work.

Snow, a graphic designer, made an appointment to see her doctor, who ordered a battery of tests. "The doctor came in and said, point-blank, 'Here's the deal: You're prediabetic. You have to change your ways.' I sat there with this towel wrapped around me and said, 'Oh, crap!' "

But she answered the wake-up call. Though she claims to suffer from "the opposite of anorexia—I look in the mirror and say, 'Oh, not so bad!,'" Snow acknowledged that her double-X clothes were too snug. When she got a mail offer for a new book, *The Sugar Solution* (published by Rodale, *Prevention's* parent company), she ordered it. It was a diet, exercise and stress-reduction plan that promised weight loss, newfound energy, even protection from diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and cancer. The secret? Controlling blood sugar.

"My fasting blood sugar was 120 and it should be under 100," says Snow. "It sounded like this program was on the money for me."

Following the book's advice, she said good-bye to cookies and candy. "I love them, but we've ended our relationship," she jokes. She switched to whole grains and filled up on vegetables, protein and fruit. She began walking daily on her treadmill ("after I cleaned the dust off"), starting at 2.5 MPH for 15 minutes, and adding time and speed every week.

Within two weeks, she felt her energy surging back. After a month, she was shedding two pounds a week. By the end of the year, she was walking 45 minutes every day, had lost 52 pounds, and had shaved 10 inches off her waist. Even better, her blood sugar is now normal (90); her cholesterol went from a high of 220 mg/dl down to 180; and her triglycerides—another blood fat closely linked to diet—dropped from 300 mg/dl to 140 mg/dl (optimal is less than 150). And her mood has improved. "The worst thing about the plan was that I was buying new clothes every month," says Snow. "It's a good problem to have."

Why It Works

To understand how you can lose weight like Sandra Snow did—and reap all the health benefits—you need to know a little about your metabolism. Everything you eat that contains carbs, from Caesar salad to a slice of cherry cheesecake, is ultimately converted into glucose—blood sugar—which is what your body's cells use for energy. Any excess is stored as fat. In the lean times (when you're on a diet and exercising, for example), your body will burn fat for energy to keep you going. That's how you lose weight.

Glucose gets into cells with the help of insulin, a hormone produced by your pancreas. This system works pretty efficiently when you're eating a variety of foods: whole grains, protein and fat, which are digested and metabolized slowly for energy over the long haul, as well as simple carbohydrates, which are digested and absorbed quickly.

But if your diet favors these fast-burning carbs, your insulin-production system has to work overtime—the pancreas must produce more insulin to open up cells and usher in all the sugar. So far, so good—but as your body realizes it's flush with fuel, two dire things happen. It stops burning fat stores for energy *and* it begins storing more of the food you eat as fat. So you gain weight.

Your insulin levels plummet once all the glucose is either feeding your cells or packed onto your belly and hips. But with blood sugar bottomed out too, you're left tired, moody and hungry for more sugary foods to boost your energy levels.

If your diet continually requires lots of insulin, the hormone can eventually become less efficient, a condition called insulin resistance. So your pancreas produces still more. But when extra insulin circulates, it can damage your heart and create problems. People with prediabetic conditions or diabetes are up to four times as likely as healthy people to get heart disease and are at increased risk of cancers of the breast, uterus, colon and pancreas.

The Sugar Solution is designed to keep your glucose control system steady, whether you have diabetes, are prediabetic, or are an otherwise healthy but overweight carb addict. It can even melt stubborn belly fat—the dangerous fat that increases your risk of diabetes and heart disease. In a Danish study, 25 people who raised their daily protein levels to the amount recommended in *The Sugar Solution* (up to 25 percent of daily calories) lost 10 percent more belly fat than dieters who ate more carbs. Aerobic exercise most days of the week—along with strength-training—also attacks abdominal fat and is an important part of this program.

The eating plan, developed by nutrition expert Ann Fittante, RD, at the Joslin Diabetes Center in Seattle, is based on the glycemic index (GI), a system that ranks foods by how much and how quickly they raise blood sugar. Eating low-GI foods frequently during the day (three meals and three snacks) has been shown to keep blood sugar levels on an even keel for hours. There's growing evidence that a low-GI eating plan can help you lose weight, keep it off, switch off cravings, and make you feel energetic, *even when you're eating fewer calories.*

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Size Your Servings

The Sugar Solution plan helps you create filling meals that steady blood sugar with high-fiber carbohydrates—fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains. The protein fills you up and boosts metabolism, so you'll burn more calories up to three hours after you eat.

Dairy foods help you lose weight and protect against metabolic syndrome, which raises your risk of heart attack, stroke and cancer. The plan even includes daily snacks and treats, such as wine and chocolate, to help fight the deprivation that dooms so many diets. The following are typical serving sizes.

● Fruit

- 1 med whole fruit (apple, banana, peach, etc.)
- 1/4 c dried fruit
- 1 c fresh, frozen, or canned fruit (berries, melon, grapes, etc.)

● Vegetables

- 1 c raw, leafy vegetables
- 1/2 c cooked vegetables
- 6 oz vegetable juice

● Grains

- 1 slice whole grain bread
- 1/2-1 c cooked or dry cereal
- 1/2 c cooked rice or pasta
- 3 c popcorn
- 1/2 c cooked whole grain pasta
- 1/2 c cooked quinoa or barley

● Protein

- 3 oz cooked beef, pork, poultry, or fish (the size of your palm)
- 1 1/2 oz reduced-fat cheese
- 1 oz or 2 Tbsp almonds, walnuts, or cashews
- 1 Tbsp nut butter
- 1 egg
- 4 oz tofu
- 1/2 c cooked beans

● Dairy

- 8 oz (1 c) 1% (or fat-free) milk
- 1 c low-fat or fat-free plain or fruit yogurt (150 calories or less per 6 to 8 oz serving)

● Good fats

Get 25 percent to 30 percent of your daily calories from fat, including daily servings of the good fats your body needs most, such as olive, canola, or flaxseed oil; ground flaxseed; and avocado. The nuts mentioned under protein also provide healthy oils: walnuts, almonds, cashews, peanuts, and peanut and almond butters (these servings can be in addition to your protein servings).

- 1 oz or 2 Tbsp nuts/seeds (5+ servings per week)
- 1/8 avocado
- Limit added oils (preferably extra virgin olive oil) to 1 Tbsp per day

Treat yourself

If you're happy with your weight—or weight loss—you can have one or two treats every day. But limit each one to 80 to 150 calories.

- 1/2 oz dark chocolate (e.g., one Lindt truffle)
- Frozen yogurt, ice cream, sorbet, or sherbet: 120 calories or less per 1/2 c serving
- 4-6 oz wine
- 12 oz beer
- 1 1/2 oz liquor

The Plate Rules

At a dinner party? Out at a restaurant? You can use these two simple rules to stay on *The Sugar Solution* plan:

1. Fill half your plate with vegetables and/or fruit.
2. Fill the rest with roughly equal amounts of whole grains and other high-fiber carbs, lean protein and a good source of healthy fat.

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Your Daily Plan

Don't worry about counting calories. On this plan, if you follow our guide to daily servings, you'll get about 1,600 calories or less (for serving sizes, see "[Size Your Servings](#)"). You'll also have one or two snacks or treats daily.

Here's a typical day:

- 3-4 fruits
- 4-6 vegetables
- 3-6 grains
- 2-4 protein
- 2-3 dairy
- 2-3 good fats

Trouble losing weight? Cut out treats and have just one 80-calorie snack a day, such as a serving of fruit, popcorn or an ounce of string cheese, plus two 25-calorie-or-less snacks (raw veggies, green salad dressed with vinegar, seltzer with lemon or lime, unsweetened tea).

Day 1

Breakfast:



1 serving Berry-Good Smoothie: Blend 1/2 c fresh or thawed frozen blueberries, 1/2 c low-fat vanilla yogurt, 1/2 c cranberry-blueberry juice, and 1 Tbsp ground flaxseed.



Snack:

- 3 c popcorn ●

Lunch:

- Tuna sandwich: 1/2 c tuna and 2 tsp low-fat mayo with lettuce and tomato on 2 slices whole grain bread. ●●●●
- 1 c raw sugar snap peas or other raw vegetable dipped in 2 Tbsp low-fat dressing. ●●●

Snack:

- 1 orange ●

Dinner:

- 3 oz baked chicken ●
- 1 c polenta ●●
- 2 c salad with 1 Tbsp low-fat dressing ●●●●
- 1 c steamed broccoli and yellow squash ●●
- 6 oz wine or extra 80-calorie snack

Snack:

- 1/2 c applesauce mixed with 1/2 c low-fat plain or vanilla yogurt and cinnamon. ●●

Day 2

Breakfast:

- 1 egg, prepared any style with cooking spray. ●
- 1 whole grain English muffin spread with 2 tsp trans-free margarine. ●

Snack:

1 c frozen grapes ●●

Lunch:



- 1 c low-sodium tomato soup made with fat-free milk. ●●
- 2 c salad with 2 oz grilled chicken and 1/8 avocado, dressed with 1 Tbsp low-fat dressing. ●●●●
- 1 sm slice corn bread ●

Snack:

- 2 rice cakes spread with 2 tsp all-natural peanut butter. ●●●●

Dinner:

- 3 oz grilled salmon with 2 Tbsp Cilantro-Mint Yogurt: Combine 1/4 c + 2 Tbsp low-fat plain yogurt, 2 Tbsp low-fat sour cream, 1 Tbsp chopped cilantro, 2 tsp chopped mint, 1/4 tsp salt, 1/8 tsp black pepper, and a pinch of ground red pepper (optional); refrigerate leftover sauce for other meals. ●
- 1 c whole grain pasta tossed with sauteed red bell pepper or other veggies. ●●●
- 1 c 1% milk ●

Snack:

- 1/2 c sliced fruit topped with 2 Tbsp low-fat sour cream or low-fat plain or vanilla yogurt. ●

[Next: Day 3](#)

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Day 3

Breakfast:

- 1 c high-fiber dry cereal with 1/2 c blue-berries and 2 Tbsp ground flaxseed. ●●
- 1 c 1% milk ●

Snack:

- 1 slice raisin bread, toasted, with 1 tsp trans-free margarine and a sprinkle of sugar and cinnamon. ●

Lunch:

- Nut-butter sandwich: Spread 2 Tbsp all-natural peanut butter or other nut butter and 1/2 Tbsp blackstrap molasses or 1/2 Tbsp jam on 2 slices whole grain bread. ●●●●●
- Carrot and celery sticks ●

Snack:

- 1 banana ●

Dinner:



- 3 oz beef tenderloin ●
- 1 med baked potato with 2 Tbsp low-fat sour cream ●
- 1 c steamed green beans and carrots ●●
- 2 c salad with 2 Tbsp low-fat dressing ●●●●
- 1/2 c low-fat frozen dessert topped with 1/2 c sliced strawberries ●●

Snack:

- 3 graham cracker squares with herb tea ●

Day 4

Breakfast:



Asparagus with mushroom and goat cheese omelet: Boil 4 asparagus spears for 2 to 3 minutes until crisp-tender; pat dry. Sautee sliced mushrooms in cooking spray. Whisk 2 lg eggs, 3 Tbsp 1% milk, 1 Tbsp fresh basil, 1/8 tsp black pepper, and 1/8 tsp salt. Cook omelet in 1 tsp butter. When done, sprinkle on mushrooms and 1/8 c goat cheese, fold, and serve with asparagus. ●●●●

Snack:

- 1 apple ●

Lunch:

- 1 c low-sodium vegetable soup ●
- Lg salad: Mix 1 1/2 c greens, 1/2 c chopped vegetables, 1/4 c canned chickpeas (rinsed and drained), 1/2 c chopped apple or grapes, 1/8 avocado, and bean sprouts. Dress with 2 Tbsp low-fat dressing. ●●●●●
- 1 serving whole grain crackers or 1 sm whole grain roll ●

Snack:

6-8 oz low-fat plain or vanilla yogurt ●

Dinner:

- 1 Italian-style beef burger: Mix 1 1/2 lb extralean ground beef, 5 Tbsp grated Romano cheese, 2 Tbsp pine nuts (toasted and finely chopped), 1 tsp dried oregano, 3/4 tsp garlic powder, 1/2 tsp salt, and 1/4 tsp black pepper. Divide into 4 patties (4" diameter, 1" thick). Broil 4 to 6 minutes on each side. Serve on whole grain roll. Spread with 1 Tbsp ketchup and 2 tsp mustard and top with lettuce, tomato, and onion, if desired. ●●●●●
- 2 c tossed salad with 2 Tbsp low-fat dressing ●●●●
- 1 c 1% milk ●

Snack:

- 1 serving whole grain tortilla chips (150 calories or less) and 1/8 c salsa ●●

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5 Fast Ways to Blunt Sugar

If you're knocked off the plan because of a crazy day or travel, these easy strategies can reduce the effect of a meal on your blood sugar.

Add beans: Only have time to make instant rice? Just add some beans. Throwing in a low-GI food brings down the GI rating of the entire meal.

Deploy good fat: Slather a tablespoon of peanut butter on your morning English muffin. Fat slows the absorption of sugar into the bloodstream.

Add a cheese stick, precooked chicken strips or avocado to your carb snack: A stick of string cheese or a few pieces of chicken added to a potentially blood sugar-raising snack (such as crackers or a piece of toast) will keep you full longer. Like fat, protein slows digestion and the absorption of sugars.

Have a salad with vinaigrette: Start lunch or dinner with any vinaigrette-dressed veggie medley. Arizona State University nutritionists have found that vinegar prevents blood-sugar spikes after eating. They suspect that acetic acid (the compound that makes vinegar sour) interferes with enzymes that break down carbs. Just 2 teaspoons per meal can help tame glucose.

Sprinkle on some cinnamon: As little as 1/4 teaspoon of cinnamon each day improves your body's ability to metabolize glucose, report researchers at the USDA's Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center in Maryland. A compound in this spice called methylhydroxy chalcone polymer makes cells absorb glucose faster and convert it more easily into energy, so your blood sugar stays lower.

How to Fill Your Plate

Breakfast plates:

- Whole grain cereal and milk topped with fruit
- Two slices whole grain toast with nut butter and fruit

Lunch plates:

- Sandwich filled with 2 or 3 slices of lean meat, with a salad, fruit salad or veggies
- Black bean, lentil or other bean-based soup, with a salad or side dish of vegetables and a whole grain roll or crackers

Dinner plates:

Traditional:

- Salad or cooked veggies (half the plate)
- palm-size piece of fish, poultry, or lean meat (one-third to one-quarter of the plate)
- 1 cup of whole grain pasta, brown rice, quinoa or a medium sweet potato

Stir-fry

- Three-quarters vegetables and one-quarter meat, poultry or seafood.
- Fill three-quarters of your plate with stir-fry and one-quarter with brown rice

Adapted from The Sugar Solution.