

Sugar Cravings

Self-Test & Action Plan



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Introduction

The purpose of this self-test is to give you some self-awareness around your cravings that will lead you to some practical action steps that you can take today to start to dismantle the effect cravings have on not only your eating, but your state of mind.

We will do this by analysing one specific time when you had a sugar craving. Because so many features of sugar cravings and the potential binge eating that follows are very common, after each question I will discuss common answers given. Therefore there is no scoring – instead something much more valuable: useful questions to ask yourself and experiments to try out. Your binge eating has aspects that millions of others share, but it is also a completely unique experience.

Start by thinking back to a specific occasion when you experienced sugar cravings. If no single time comes to mind, write down what would usually apply for you. Write down your answers to each question before reading the information that follows that question.

Q1: When and where did you get the sugar craving?

A:.....

Q2: What food(s) did you crave?

A:.....

Sugar cravings are far more commonly **sugar and fat cravings**. Far less people are addicted to boiled sweets than chocolate - and there is a very good reason for this. As humans, we are wired to love both sugar and fat. This goes back to our primitive, cave-dwelling ancestors. In those days, where food was genuinely scarce and unprocessed, both fat and sugar were great news for us. They provided a valuable source of energy for us, AND they were far healthier for us.

How so? The sugar was healthier because it came wrapped up in fibre (in the form of fruit) - and it is the fibre that counteracts the health-damaging fructose in fruit, by slowing down the release of blood sugar. This in turn means we don't need to produce so much insulin to bring the blood sugar levels down. And one of the jobs of insulin is to store fat.

The fat was healthier because it was in its unprocessed form, which contains essential fatty acids (notice they are not called 'optional fatty acids') or EFAs for short. EFAs do all sorts of wonderful things for us, such as lower blood sugar and balance out hormones and improve mood and cognition. Cheap fats have had all the EFAs stripped out of them these days.

The thing that helped me (and my clients) succeed in reducing the processed sugar was that I did not try to deny myself this fat/sugar mix. I just changed it so that it was healthier. All my sugar came from fruit, and I started having more healthy fats.

See the next question for a suggestion you can implement straight away to make this change.

Q3: What did you eat for breakfast that day?

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Many people find that they are plagued by sugar cravings in the mid/late afternoon, or at night. If this applies to you, you can make a great difference to the intensity of your cravings by making sure you include more healthy fat and protein in your breakfast. See this video, taken from my series *10 Ways to Stop Binge Eating* for more information:

www.theshiftinside.com/breakfast-experiment/

Q4: How overwhelmed by your cravings did you feel? Give a mark out of ten:.....

There is a curious hidden truth in the work I do coaching people with eating issues, that applies to any important change.

Here it is:

The more pain a problem causes you, the more hope there is that you will actually do the work necessary to solve that problem.

There ain't no change in the comfort zone, as the saying goes. So if your number is nearer 10 than 1, take heart. As humans we resist change. Dealing with self-sabotage is at the heart of everything I do, and if something only causes you mild discomfort, your chances of making the necessary changes are slim to non-existent. I look back and thank my lucky stars that my sugar addiction affected my PMT so aversely that it actually gave me the courage to experiment with removing it from my diet - just for a few weeks. That few weeks turned into years – four years this July to be precise. Now I have more energy and less PMT than any woman I know of my age (and many who are younger). My pain gave me a springboard to leapfrog the progress made by many people with non-compulsive eating habits. Go figure.

Q5: Can you identify any triggers for the craving? (For example: stress, anger, seeing that food, boredom, sadness etc)

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Q6: How did you respond to the craving? If you gave in to it, was this immediate?

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There are many, many things that can trigger cravings. The important point here is that you start to understand that **a trigger equals potential rather than certainty**. Every gun has a trigger, but it only becomes dangerous when someone pulls the trigger. I know that being triggered feels very disempowering, but this is only because you have wired your brain to respond every single time to the trigger in a specific way - by giving into it. Every time you repeat an action in response to a trigger, you lay down neural pathways that make that action more and more automatic.

The answer is to retrain yourself by laying down new neural pathways. In a nutshell, you keep repeating a DIFFERENT action instead of eating what you crave every time you feel triggered by something/someone.

This is why I created **Cravings Busters** - a range of strategies you can use to distract and divert yourself and channel that craving energy into something that even an overwhelmed, deeply stressed and compulsive brain can accept - even if only for five minutes.

Find out more here:

www.theshiftinside.com/cravings-are-energy/

Q7: How did you feel afterwards (answer this whether you gave into the craving or not)?

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Q8: Do you believe it is possible to change negative feelings about your cravings and eating habits?

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One of the most important aspects of my coaching is getting clients to reframe how they see themselves when it comes to food, body and weight. When I was compulsive and full to the brim with self-loathing, I used to feel immense frustration with the wishy washy idealism of the motivational gurus who told us to 'just love ourselves'. YES BUT HOW??? I want to scream. The guilt and shame I felt over my eating were far too paralysing to even scratch the surface of such ambitions like self love.

The solution is to replace self-criticism not with a thin veneer of fake self-love, but with curiosity.

It is curiosity that gets you to ask:

Maybe some of my cravings are not proof positive of my inherent badness, but a response to nutritional deficiencies?

Maybe sugar is not something I can cope with, however socially acceptable it is. Maybe I shouldn't HAVE TO cope with it?

Maybe it's easier to distract myself with binge eating than to live the meaningful existence I was put on this earth to enjoy? But perhaps that feels too scary deep down? And what if that fear is actually unjustified?

It was curiosity that led me to create **Sabotage You**.

We all have a Sabotage Self. It messes up our lives, but the truth is it is just trying to help us in its cack-handed, tunnel vision way.

My cravings were merely foot soldiers of Sabotage Harriet.

And the biggest surprise of all was that regaining control of my eating - and indeed life - happened not through throwing Sabotage Harriet out of the house of my mind. It happened when I sat down and listened to her, acknowledged her - and told her she was out of a job. The sacking of Sabotage Harriet was not an overnight process – in fact she still likes to give me a hard time whenever I do anything to improve my life – but the difference is that these days I have a whole host of strategies to turn the volume down on her rantings and ravings.

Find out more about your Sabotage Self in this video:

www.theshiftinside.com/sabotage-and-rebellion/

Can you see how reframes like this one give you back your power? No longer are you an inadequate, passive victim of desires you can't control. You are now a detective in charge of solving the greatest mystery of your life - why food has become so powerful for you. In what ways have you turned it into a weapon against yourself?

Action Plan

The action plan I have for you is very, very simple.

It is a 3-word action plan.

Are you ready? Here it is:

Do one thing.

I want you to do just one thing from everything you have just absorbed. Your Sabotage Self will NOT want you to do anything. So get under her (or his) skin and start small, so *they don't even notice*.

Write out and fill in the following sentence, then put the commitment where you can see it multiple times a day (next to the kettle always works for me!):

I commit to the following ONE action over the next 7 days:

.....

Examples:

I commit to try out Text Salvation every time I get a craving this week.

I commit to try out The Primitive Getaway every time I get a craving this week.

I commit to journaling every day this week about my cravings

I commit to writing myself a letter from Sabotage Me

I commit to try 3 breakfasts this week that include protein and healthy fat – just to see if they affect my cravings.

When you are comfortable with that one action, add another.

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Please let me know how you get on with this self-test. Contact me: *info (at) theshiftinside.com*

To watch the entire video series *10 ways to Stop Binge Eating* (from which all the videos in this self-test are taken), you can access it here:

<http://www.theshiftinside.com/10-ways-video-series/>

Cheers now

Your coach, Harriet

