

COMMON DETOX SYMPTOMS & THE NATURE OF CRAVINGS

As you go through the first couple of weeks, I want to make sure you are aware of some the changes you might experience, both physically and mentally. I spoke to **Jad Patrick**, a practicing naturopath and a nutritional counsellor, about the most common detox symptoms and cravings you might experience during a low-carb reset plan.



What are the most common detox symptoms and how to cope with them?

Headaches: These can be common as people cut back on sugar, caffeine and refined carbohydrates. Typically they occur mid-morning or mid-afternoon when you may be used to having a sugar or caffeine “hit”. The best way to avoid this is to make sure you are having adequate water, eating enough food to feel satisfactorily full, making sure you have fats and proteins with each meal, and making sure you aren’t deliberately restricting calories. If the headache is mild then light exercise, a massage or even a light rest can often alleviate it. If symptoms are more severe or continue to escalate please speak to a health practitioner.

Digestive Ailments: Whilst the plan is designed to improve digestive health, often sudden changes to the diet can create sudden changes in digestive function as the body (and our microbes) adjust to new foods.

If bloating is an issue – try spacing meals 4 hours apart, applying a hot water bottle to the area of discomfort, and wearing loose fitting clothing to allow gas to pass through more easily. Chew food thoroughly. Peppermint, chamomile and lemon balm tea may all help with bloating. If diarrhoea or loose stools is an issue consider easing back on very spicy dishes or meals with a lot of onion and garlic. Increase your fluid consumption. If symptoms persist longer than 24 hours or cause pain or distress then please see your health practitioner.

Constipation can also occur as you change the amount and types of fibre you eat. There tend to be two types – you get ‘the urge but no surge’ (i.e. you feel the need to go but struggle to pass a stool). This may indicate you need more soft, soluble fibre. Try taking a tablespoon of chia seeds mixed with a glass of water daily. The other type is ‘no urge, no surge’ (i.e. you don’t seem to want to go to the toilet despite eating a lot of food). This can be a bit trickier to deal with. Exercise and loose fitting clothing helps. Sit on the toilet each morning even if you do not need to go and practice relaxation. Try dandelion root tea brewed very strongly first thing in the morning and before bed at night. If symptoms persist speak to your healthcare practitioner.

‘Carb-flu’: Anecdotally, people sometimes experience strong fatigue, headaches and severe irritability when they cut back drastically on carbohydrates and sugar. This is sometimes known as the low-carb flu. It is often accompanied by mild dehydration and bad breath. It is actually a good sign that your body is moving into ‘fat burning mode’ rather than sugar burning mode. Use extra coconut or MCT oil if this occurs to replace the quick energy usually provided by carbohydrates. Drink extra water and see if adding a bit more salt to foods helps. Potassium-rich foods are also important so eat plenty of avocado, nuts, and (when allowed) coconut water can be useful.

Sugar Cravings: Very common and often intense. Make sure you are eating adequate servings of allowed foods, good fats and proteins. Eat an on-plan snack and notice how the craving changes in severity. Observe the craving rather than mentally fighting it, and notice what time of day it occurred and in what context. This can point towards whether it’s stress, emotions, or lack of fuel that are triggering the craving. See more below.

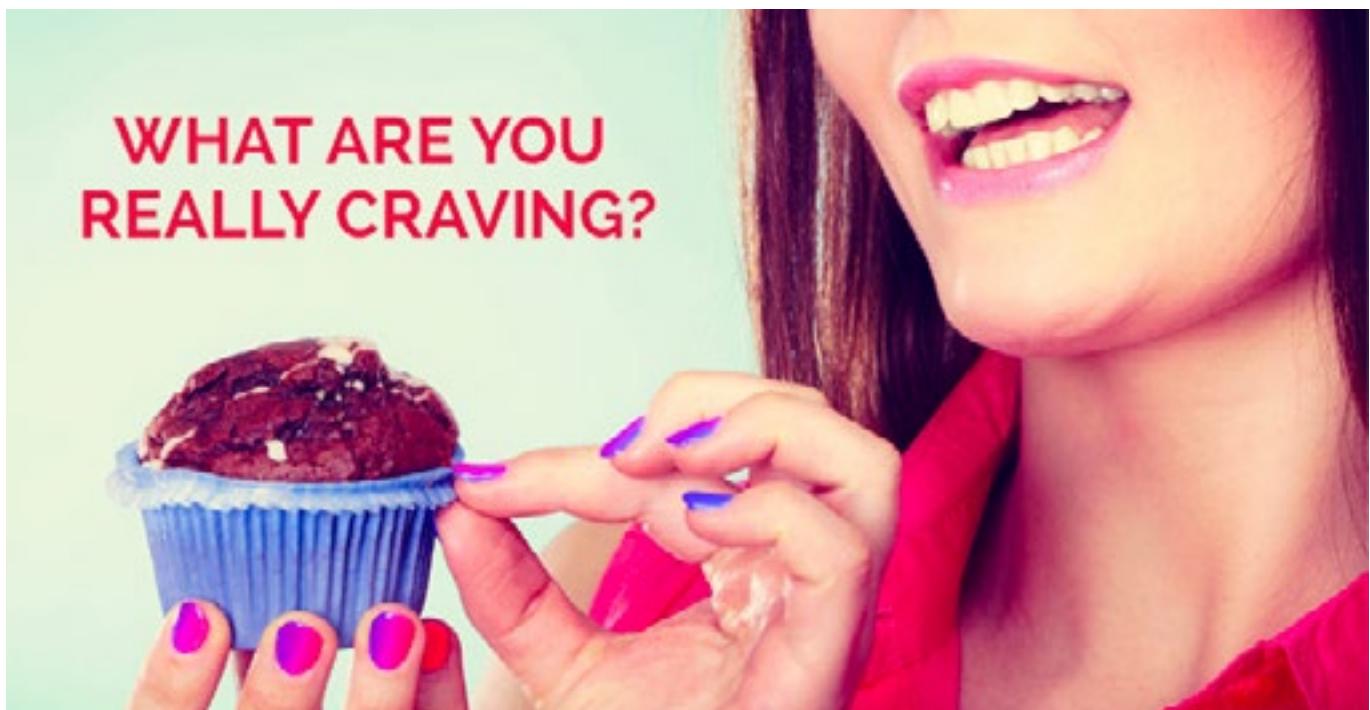
Danger Symptoms: It is very unlikely a balanced plan such as this can cause any severe symptoms; however, if you experience dizziness, prolonged discomfort, fainting or any other sudden changes not listed above, please see your health practitioner.

These symptoms are likely to be most noticeable within 24 hours of cutting back on the foods not allowed in the plan. Caffeine and sugar withdrawal in particular are likely to cause the worst symptoms. After 48 hours, most symptoms (aside from the odd craving) are likely to be less intense and more manageable. If you continue with the plan, after a week or two, you should be feeling even better than before, with less of all the above symptoms and better energy and focus.

Don’t be afraid to ask for support in times when you experience any discomfort during the plan!

What can you tell us about cravings?

Cravings are sneaky little impulses that can catch us off guard and are often very hard to ignore. They are inevitable to some degree for everyone, but they can become more noticeable when we change our habits, especially in regards to the foods we eat. Given that they are likely to appear during the plan, here is how best to respond to them.



Firstly, you need to change how you see cravings. They are not necessarily a bad thing; in fact, they can often be a message that your body needs something. So the first thing you need to do is not ignore them, but to pay attention to them.

Do this with curiosity and notice where and how the craving arises. Is it constant, or does it come and go? Some cravings last or repeat themselves and some are momentary whims. Pause when you first notice a craving, and sit with it for a while. Most times, it will pass and you can carry on with your day. When it does not pass, however, you can dig a little deeper into what might be going on.

Secondly – explore what type of a craving it might be.

NUTRITIONAL: These are cravings for things our body might need, and might be for very specific foods or weird combinations of foods. These cravings are common in pregnancy. They can also be common when you haven't eaten enough calories, are adjusting to a lower carbohydrate intake, haven't eaten enough protein or fat, or have skipped meals during the day. It is important then when on the plan to eat large, filling meals and not to skimp on the recommended serves or proteins and fats.

BLOOD SUGAR: When we are stressed, when our bodies are adapting to a lower carb intake, when we haven't had enough sleep, or when we haven't eaten enough calories, our blood sugar level can start to fluctuate – which typically triggers very strong cravings for sugary or refined carbohydrate rich foods. Our bodies want a quick source of energy, and it has learnt over the years that the quickest way to get this is from a sugary snack. It can take awhile for our bodies to get more efficient at using fat as a fuel source, so in the initial few weeks you may experience some of these cravings. When this happens, it means you need to look at what is triggering this blood sugar imbalance.

- Is it stress?
- Did you get enough sleep?
- Have you skipped any meals?
- Or is it just your body adjusting to a lower sugar intake?

Satisfy the craving with a recommended snack on the plan, and address some of the potential triggers listed above.

SENSORY: This is when cues from our environment trigger a craving (e.g. walking past a bakery might trigger a craving for bread). You can reduce these cravings by eliminating visual cues around the house, and by keeping healthy snack options around for when you encounter a sensory craving.

MEMORY: These cravings are for foods that provide us with comfort and pleasure. Often they are foods we have eaten since childhood, or that remind us of fun or happy times. We usually crave these foods when we are experiencing uncomfortable emotions. See the section on emotional eating if you feel this may be what is causing your cravings.

Once you have paused and explored what type of a craving you are experiencing, you can either (a) choose to satisfy the craving with a healthier option, (b) sit with the craving and watch it rise and flow and pass reminding yourself of what your goals are with this plan, or (c) eat a small amount of the food you are craving, paying very close attention to how you feel, slow the process down, and whatever you do – try not to make yourself feel guilty about it! Guilt will just trigger stronger desires for pleasurable feelings, triggering more cravings.

CRAVINGS SOS

It's bound to happen. Whether you're doing good for a day or for a week, that sneaky little voice inside your head is going to rear its ugly head at some point. It will say, "Eat me" as you stare down the office break room table full of homemade cookies. You can't predict when it will happen, but you can trust that it will. Let's get you armed with strategies to fight that little voice inside your head.



More often than not, our overwhelming desire to eat chocolate ice cream RIGHT NOW (and all of it...) is not actual hunger. But where does that little demon come from? Stress. Sleep. What you ate earlier. The brain and the body have a tendency to disconnect when these factors are neglected.

MAKING SENSE OF SUGAR CRAVINGS

Fatigue is a huge culprit. When we're tired, we seek immediate energy, and our bodies know that sugar and carbs can give us that. Furthermore, not getting enough sleep can make you less inhibited to make good choices. Think about ways to improve sleep. This won't fix the craving at present, but it will help to prevent them in the long-term. If your cravings hit around the same time as that afternoon nap-bug, take a breather and get a few minutes of shut-eye. Sugar is also a cause of fatigue, brain fog, and

overall sluggishness hence the term “sugar hangover”. Therefore, eating sugar now isn’t going to give you the boost of energy you’re seeking. Instead, it will start a vicious cycle of sleepiness and cravings.

Stress management is key. Sugar cravings can be attributed to a few stress-related issues. The term “comfort food” is a legitimate concept with science to back it up. When our brain is producing too much cortisol (the stress hormone), the foods we tend to reach for have a positive effect on reducing how strongly we feel these emotions. Obviously, the positive effects don’t outweigh the negative ones. Address the stress in ways that won’t negatively impact your health such as meditation, moderate exercise, and social activities.

Check your nutrition. Even if you believe you’re getting everything you need, deficiencies can happen, and they can cause cravings to bubble up. There are a few ways these “missing foods” can cause cravings. For example, we often crave foods that we’re allergic or sensitive to. Naturally, you should avoid these foods, but the body reaches out for them to reduce the “withdrawal” symptoms. Instead of reaching for the hyper-palatable foods, choose some greens, foods with probiotics, and sea vegetables, which contain concentrated amounts of nutrients, vitamins, and minerals your body might be missing out on.

Naturally sweet food like fruits (especially dried) and honey can also drive the need for MORE. If you’re reaching for these ‘healthy’ foods to subdue sugar cravings too frequently, you may notice that it’s only making things worse. Reaching for low-glycaemic fruits such as berries or apples in place of something like dates can make a world of difference. Dried fruits contain concentrated amounts of sugar that can cause your body to react in the same way it would to eating a cupcake.

Gender plays a role. Being a female when it comes to food cravings doesn’t quite work in your favour. Women tend to gravitate towards sweets while men are more inclined to indulge in savoury foods (think sushi, steak, potatoes). The common denominator is that these foods we crave are energy-dense. Women are also more likely to have hormonal imbalances that can cause cravings.



CRAVINGS SOS

- **Stop using food as a reward.** Our inner reward system is powerful, and it turns those potential moments of weakness into a logical excuse to dive right in. When we use phrases such as, “I’ve been good, I deserve this” or “I’ve had a bad day, this [food] will make it better”, we’re fostering a negative relationship with food. These emotional rationalisations completely miss the point of moving past our cravings and feeding our brain – not our bodies – in a different, more fulfilling way. We often aren’t even aware of these subconscious thoughts because we inherently seek pleasure in food. Think about your WHY.
- **Learn to embrace saying “no”.** Cravings can get the best of us due to social situations, pressure to eat with others, or the desire to “eat like a normal person”. Combined with the modern culture of saying, “Yes” to everything, we immediately rationalise straying from our eating plan to feel included or act polite. When you understand that you have the power and ability to say “No” whenever you want to, these situations become something YOU are in control of. Grant yourself that freedom.
- **Drink a tall glass of water.** We have a tendency to confuse our thirst for hunger. If you feel like candy directly after eating a balanced lunch with protein and fat, you might just be thirsty. Drinking will also give you some time to think why you have the craving. Before you give in, sip on something.
- **Fat is your friend.** Fat is the most satiating of the macronutrients (protein, carbs, and fat), so make sure you’re getting enough. In recent years, we’ve been taught that all fat is bad for us; but hopefully, you’re learning to accept that just isn’t the case! If you’re still skimping on healthy cooking oils, fatty fruits like avocado, oily fish, and the beloved bacon, consider taking it up a notch. If you’re not getting enough fat throughout your daily meals, you’re more likely to get hungry in between ‘em. Furthermore, you should pair starch and sugar with fat to lessen the effects on blood sugar; think of it as a buffer. If you’re feeling peckish, try downing a teaspoon of coconut oil instead.
- **Get spicy.** Spices in the food make them more satisfying, flavourful, and healthy. Certain spices – especially warm spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, and cardamom – add sweetness to the meal naturally while subduing cravings and helping to manage blood sugar.
- **L-glutamine.** This is a supplement that has been shown to lessen and reduce cravings for sugar. It’s also good for regulating digestion and improving the immune system, so it can’t hurt. The jury is still out, but the studies yield promising results.

TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS



Scott Gooding
Scott Gooding Project

Begin by reading food labels and understanding the different guises sugar comes in, as well as understanding serving sizes. Having a **visual representation of sugar** in a product will help to curb indulges too – knowing 4 grams of sugar equates to 1 tsp sugar is often a deterrent.



Larina Robinson
The Body Dietetics

Drink more water! Half the time, you're just thirsty when you go hunting for a snack. If regular water doesn't work, drink some soda water with a dash of fresh lime juice.



Lee Holmes
Supercharged Food

Look deeper at why you are having that craving and understand the emotional reason behind it.



Michelle Spring
Thriving On Paleo

When I'm trying to get over sugar and carb cravings, I let myself snack as much as I feel I need to – but only on protein and fat.



Jaclyn Harwell
The Family That Heals Together

My best tip for getting through sugar cravings is to allow yourself a little nibble of raw honey when the cravings get unbearable. **Just stick it out and don't cave**, or the cravings will just keep coming back.



Debra Dorn
The Saffron Girl

Part of how I achieved eliminating sugar was by **cleaning out my pantry first**. If I ever have an urge for something sweet, my only option is fruit.



Jo Romero
Comfort Bites

Follow the, “**No, not even JUST one**” rule. In the beginning, we’d go out and my husband would order some treats for himself and the children and say “Oh come on, just one won’t hurt”. So I ordered a wedge of Cookie Dough Cheesecake. And do you know what happened? I went home and ate chocolate, and then biscuits and then the next day it continued, until I had to stop and start the whole thing over again.



Nazanin Kovacs
Naz Kovacs

I would say my number one tip is to **start your day off with a meal based on protein and fat**. Also drinking some warm water with lemon/raw apple cider vinegar first thing. Sometimes cravings are more psychological. It’s important to really listen to your body and see if you actually really do want something sweet or you’re just conditioned to think that way. **Most importantly**, I would also say **ditch the guilt**.



Alexa Schirm
Simple Roots Wellness

Try **eating within a set period of time** during the day. Eat all of your food within a 12 hour span or less to ensure that your hormones are working with you keeping you in a fat-burning state.



Sheila Walsh Dunton
Purple Beet Nutrition

My favourite tip is introducing people to **coconut butter**. Just a spoonful really satiates.



Erin Carter
Pure & Simple Nourishment

Sugar and carb cravings are often triggered by boredom or feelings of anxiety. Next time one hits, **go for a 10 minute walk** or find an activity to do and I bet those cravings will go away.