

## WELLBEING

## BEAT SUGAR

After vowing to overcome her sugar addiction four years ago, Davina McCall says living sugar free is the sweetest feeling. Here she shares her experiences and tips for anyone keen to do the same

**She has successfully** battled drug and alcohol addiction, given up smoking and pushed herself beyond breaking point for Sport Relief by swimming, running and cycling 500 miles from Edinburgh to London in gruelling conditions. But Davina McCall's latest challenge is one many of us would find almost as difficult. Four years ago the TV presenter and mum of three kicked her processed-sugar habit and, says the 47-year-old, she feels a lot better for it.

"So many women and men have said how in awe they are of me giving up sugar and I know exactly why – because it is really hard. Sugar has become part of our daily routine," explains Davina. "After a meal I would get that need for something sweet that we all identify with and I would find myself drinking endless tea and coffee – not because I needed it but because I needed that hit of sugar.

"Everyone knows that I'm clean from drink and drugs, but I found myself craving sugar in a way that was reminiscent of needing to take drugs, because it is an addiction. I didn't like feeling that way at all. It reminded me of being an addict."

## SWEET TALK

It wasn't just feeling out of control of her cravings that made Davina want to beat them, however. The more she learnt about the effects of processed sugar on the body, the more determined she was to give it up, and to do so she drew upon her previous experiences in calling time on her drinking and drug use.

Over the past four years Davina has barely touched processed sugar, although she does admit to the odd lapse. "I do have the occasional pudding when I'm out for supper as I think it's impossible to be completely sugar free."

She also upped her sugar intake during her Sport Relief challenge because her energy requirements were so great. "I needed sugar to fuel my body, otherwise I couldn't get enough calories into my body. And it was much harder to give it up again after that – harder than the first time. I hated myself every morning after I gave in and ate sugar, even though I knew that my body needed it at the time."

Having successfully kicked the habit twice, Davina is now keen to help others who want to do the same. Her new book, *Davina's 5 Weeks To Sugar-Free* (Orion; £16.99), is a heartfelt, honest account of her decision to give up her last



remaining "addiction". In it you will find advice, support, humour and recipes that will inspire you to start your own sugar-free eating plan.

If, like Davina, you want to completely eradicate refined sugar from your diet, her homemade treats will make staying on the wagon a lot easier. Featuring ingredients such as honey, processed sugar-free maple syrup and fruits – foodstuffs that supply a hit of sweetness without the extreme highs and lows of processed sugar – these include versions of clafouti and pancakes.

"There is a recipe for chocolate mousse that is so, so, so good. I make mini shot glasses of it for friends when they come over for dinner. That is enough to satisfy those cravings. And there is an amazing digestive biscuit recipe," she says. "I love a biscuit that you can have a little dunky dunk in

your tea or coffee at 4pm." These days, that is tea and coffee minus the sugar, of course. Despite finding unsweetened tea unpalatable initially, she now prefers it that way. "If I taste even half a teaspoon of sugar in tea it tastes disgusting to me."

## KEEPING THEM SWEET

There is one area where Davina relaxes her rules, however – with her family. "This is my journey and I think it is quite unrealistic to ask children to be sugar free," she says. "There are puddings at school and I don't want my children to be the only ones sat at a table not eating them, saying, 'Oh I can't have that – my mum's sugar free.' That's not helpful at all."

Instead, the cupboards of the home she shares with her two daughters, young son and husband Matthew are filled with her own processed sugar-free treats and puddings. "They are absolutely delicious. Kids can have them, realise they are tasty and also learn that there are healthier alternatives to processed sugar. We try to keep sweets to a treat on a Sunday, when we all go and get the papers. The children are allowed three small sweets, like a Chupa Chups lolly, each week. So I do try to limit their sugar intake, but not their pleasure."

And for those who would like to follow her example but do not think they have the willpower? She says you might surprise yourself.

"For me, the thought of giving up was worse than actually doing it. Nothing after that feels as bad as that feeling of beating yourself up the next morning after a day of

eating too much sugar. It can be hard to watch people eat sugary desserts when you can't, but I promise you that you end up not wanting them. You get such a sense of freedom knowing that you no longer feel that addictive need to have something. I promise – it's worth it."

Having achieved so much already on the health and fitness front, you might think that Davina's resolution list for 2015 would be pretty short – but there is one thing she aims to tackle this year.

"During my Sports Relief challenge I started eating sugar and carb-loading, then I stopped exercising a bit afterwards yet carried on eating," she says. "I want not to yo-yo so much – 2015 is my year of stability. I am happy at 10 stone and I want to stay that way."

## DAVINA'S DISHES

Want to try some of Davina's wholesome recipes for yourself? Here's a taster to get you started...



### PORK, BEAN AND SWEET POTATO CHILLI

'I get stuck in a rut with recipes and make the same things over and over, with lots of chicken and beef. But pork mince is a great alternative and this variation on chilli makes a nice change from regular chilli con carne. You can find chipotle paste in supermarkets'

Serves 4

Preparation time **10 minutes**

Cooking time **50-55 minutes**

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 500g/1lb 2oz pork mince
- 2 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp (or to taste) chipotle paste or other hot sauce
- 400g/14oz can of beans (pinto, black-eyed peas or black), drained and rinsed
- 400g/14oz can of tomatoes
- 250g/9oz sweet potatoes (1 large or 2 small), peeled and cut into large dice

1. Heat the oil in a large saucepan or casserole dish. Add the onion and red pepper and cook gently over a low to medium heat for 5-7 minutes, until they're just starting to soften. Add the garlic and cook for another minute.
2. Add the pork mince and stir until it's all well browned. Add the cumin, oregano and chipotle paste, then tip in the beans and tomatoes.
3. Pour 400ml of water into the pan, then add the diced sweet potatoes, pushing them well into the chilli.
4. Bring the mixture to the boil then turn the heat down to a simmer and cover the pan. Simmer the chilli for 30 minutes then remove the lid and continue to simmer for another 15 minutes to reduce the sauce.
5. Sprinkle with fresh coriander and serve with brown basmati rice and lime wedges. If liked, add small bowls of grated cheese, diced avocado and soured cream for your diners to help themselves to.



### BRUSCHETTA

'This is basically lovely things on toast. These toppings are a couple of my favourites. Taleggio is a semi-soft Italian cheese that melts beautifully. If you don't have any, use any other cheese that melts well, such as Gruyère or blue cheese'

Serves 4

Preparation time **10-20 minutes**

Cooking time **5-10 minutes**

- 4 slices of good sourdough or firm wholemeal bread
- 1 garlic clove, halved lengthways
- olive oil
- salt and black pepper

#### Mushroom and Taleggio topping

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 10g butter
- 400g/14oz portobellini or button mushrooms, sliced
- 1 garlic clove
- A few sprigs of fresh thyme
- 4 slices of Taleggio cheese

#### Broad bean, ham and ricotta topping

- 200g/7oz broad beans (fresh or frozen)
- 1 tbsp olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 2 slices of Parma ham, torn into small pieces
- 4 tbsp fresh ricotta cheese
- A squeeze of lemon juice
- A few torn fresh basil leaves

1. To make the mushroom topping, preheat the grill to its highest setting. Add the olive oil and butter to a frying pan. When the butter starts to foam, add the mushrooms, garlic and thyme and season with salt and pepper. Cook over a high heat, stirring regularly, until the mushrooms have cooked through and browned.

2. Meanwhile, toast the slices of bread. Rub one side of each slice with the cut garlic then drizzle with a little olive oil.

3. Divide the cooked mushrooms between the bruschetta and top each with a slice of cheese. Place under the grill until the cheese has melted and is bubbling.

4. To make the broad bean, ham and ricotta topping, bring a pan of water to the boil, add the broad beans and cook for 4 minutes then drain. When cool enough to handle, slip the greyish skin off each bean and discard.

5. Heat the oil in a frying pan. Add the ham and cook it briefly until brown then add the broad beans and season with salt and pepper.

6. Spread each slice of toast with ricotta cheese. Divide the broad bean and ham mix between the bruschetta. Add a squeeze of lemon juice, drizzle with a little olive oil and sprinkle with the basil leaves just before serving.



## AMERICAN-STYLE FLUFFY PANCAKES

'Traditional American pancakes are made with buttermilk, which gives them that lovely fluffiness. But I've discovered that you can get the same effect by souring milk with a dash of lemon. It thickens the milk and the pancakes work a treat. Keep the pancakes warm in a low oven while you make a stack and serve them with bacon and a drizzle of maple syrup for the whole USA vibe, or with blueberries and crème fraîche'

Makes about **16**  
Preparation time **5-10 minutes**  
Cooking time **30 minutes**

- 225g/8fl oz full-fat milk
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 1 egg
- ½ vanilla pod
- 175g/6oz spelt flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- A pinch of cinnamon
- 1 tbsp soft butter or coconut oil

**1.** Preheat the oven to 130°C, 250°F, Gas ½ to keep the pancakes warm as you make them.

**2.** In a bowl, stir together the milk and lemon juice then leave the mixture to stand for 5 minutes or so until it has thickened – you've just made buttermilk! The hint of

sourness makes the pancakes lighter in texture and fluffier.

**3.** Lightly beat the egg in a cup then stir into the buttermilk. Split open the vanilla pod and scrape out the seeds with your thumb or the blade of a knife into the buttermilk.

**4.** In a large bowl, mix together the flour, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda and cinnamon. Make a well in the centre and gradually add the buttermilk, stirring in the flour as you go until you have a smooth, lump-free batter.

**5.** Melt the butter or coconut oil in a large frying pan then tip the melted fat into the batter and stir well. Wipe the inside of the frying pan with a piece of kitchen towel.

**6.** Place the frying pan on the heat. Make 2 pancakes at a time by adding 2 lots of about 2 tbsp of batter, spaced well apart. Cook for 1-2 minutes, until you can see the batter starting to set around the edges, then flip them over (the underside should have browned nicely). Cook the pancakes for another 1-2 minutes then keep them warm in the oven while you make the remainder (you may need to grease the pan between batches).

**7.** Serve in a stack with blueberries and crème fraîche, or American style with bacon and maple syrup.



## CLAFOUTIS

'I wasn't sure about including a clafoutis recipe but my girlfriends were all shocked, saying: "What kind of French person are you? You have to have a clafoutis." So I have and it's amazing'

Serves **6**  
Preparation time **15 minutes**  
Cooking time **25-30 minutes**

- Butter, for greasing
- 500g/1lb 2oz cherries, pitted
- 50g/2oz spelt flour
- 50g/2oz ground almonds
- Pinch of salt
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 200ml/7fl oz full-fat milk
- 100ml/4fl oz double cream

- 75ml/3fl oz maple syrup
- ½ tsp almond extract (to taste)

**1.** Preheat the oven to 180°C, 350°F, Gas 4. Grease a 23cm round shallow ovenproof dish with butter (don't use a loose-bottomed tin as the batter will run out). Spread the cherries evenly over the base of the dish.

**2.** In a bowl, mix together the flour, ground almonds and a pinch of salt. Whisk in the eggs, followed by the milk, double cream, maple syrup and almond extract. Pour over the cherries and bake in the oven for 25-30 minutes, until golden brown and slightly puffed up.

**3.** Serve warm with double cream.

### DAVINA'S TIPS FOR GOING SUGAR FREE

- Go cold turkey: "The first few days are tough but it's worth it."
- Go natural: "Allow yourself to occasionally have naturally sweet foods, sweetened with maple syrup or honey."
- Be prepared: "I swear by those little bags of nuts and raisins to stave off the urges."
- Get cooking at home: "The best way to avoid processed sugars is to prepare naturally sweetened treats for yourself and your family."

• For more information on Davina's sugar-free progress and her new seven minutes a day workout video, visit [thisisdavina.com](http://thisisdavina.com).

