



# **THE ZERO SUGAR CHALLENGE**

*The Ultimate Guide to Breaking Your  
Sugar Addiction*

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*Welcome!*

Congratulations on taking this powerful step towards a healthier and more energized you. This guide is your companion on a journey to reduce your sugar intake, boost your well-being, and cultivate mindful eating habits.

Inside, you'll find a carefully curated collection of recipes, tips, and insights designed to make your sugar-free experience both enjoyable and sustainable. Whether you're aiming for weight management, improved energy levels, or just a healthier lifestyle, this guide is tailored to support your unique goals.

Remember, you're not alone in this journey. Feel free to explore, experiment, and savor the delicious alternatives provided. Your body and mind will thank you for the positive changes ahead.

**Here's to a sweeter life without the added sugars!**

*SOMER SCHREIBER-SMALL, FNP-C*

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# WELCOME

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# Introduction

## WHY GO ZERO-SUGAR

Sugar is a common ingredient in many foods and can be challenging to avoid. From sugary drinks to desserts, sugar is found in almost everything we eat, and it can significantly impact our health. While sugar may taste good, it is not the healthiest option for our bodies. Consuming too much sugar can lead to various health issues, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and even cancer.

Going zero sugar means eliminating all forms of added sugar from your diet. This includes not only the obvious sources of sugar, such as candy and soda, but also hidden sources, such as condiments, sauces, and even some types of bread.

Eliminating sugar from your diet can have a positive impact on your health. For instance, it can help you lose weight, reduce inflammation, and improve your overall well-being. A zero-sugar diet can help you break free from sugar addiction and reduce cravings for sweet foods.

Transitioning to a zero-sugar lifestyle can be challenging, especially if you have a sweet tooth. However, with the right information, support, and mindset, it is possible to go zero sugar and achieve a healthier, more balanced life.

In this eBook, we will explore the science behind sugar addiction, the different types of sugar, hidden sources in your diet, and how to overcome sugar cravings. We will also provide practical tips on meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking, and eating out on a zero-sugar diet. By the end of this eBook, you will have all the tools and knowledge you need to take on the one-month sugar-free challenge and reap the benefits of a healthier, sugar-free lifestyle.

# The Science

## BEHIND SUGAR ADDICTION

Sugar addiction is a term used to describe a compulsive craving for sweet foods and drinks. The idea of sugar addiction has gained traction in recent years, with some researchers suggesting that sugar can be as addictive as drugs like cocaine and heroin. However, while evidence suggests that sugar can have addictive properties, the science behind sugar addiction is still a matter of debate.

One of the main arguments in favor of sugar addiction is that sugar activates the brain's reward system similarly to drugs of abuse. When we eat sugar, it triggers the release of dopamine in the brain, which is a neurotransmitter that is associated with pleasure and reward. This surge of dopamine creates a temporary feeling of euphoria, which can lead to cravings for more sugar to maintain this pleasurable sensation.

Research has also shown that sugar can cause brain changes similar to those seen in drug addiction. Studies using brain imaging techniques have found that sugar can lead to changes in the structure and function of the brain's reward system, which can contribute to compulsive behavior and sugar cravings.



Another argument in favor of sugar addiction is the fact that many people report experiencing withdrawal symptoms when they try to cut back on sugar. These symptoms can include headaches, mood swings, and fatigue, which are similar to the symptoms experienced by people trying to quit drugs or alcohol.

However, there are also arguments against the idea of sugar addiction. For example, some researchers have suggested that the term "addiction" may not be the most appropriate way to describe the relationship between sugar and the brain. While sugar does activate the brain's reward system, it may not necessarily be a true addiction in the same way that drugs are.

Additionally, it's important to note that not everyone who consumes sugar will develop an addiction. Genetic factors, environmental factors, and personal history can all play a role in whether someone is more susceptible to sugar addiction.

Overall, the science behind sugar addiction is still an area of active research and debate. While there is evidence to suggest that sugar can be addictive, there are also limitations and uncertainties to this research. Regardless, it's important to maintain a balanced diet that includes moderate amounts of sugar and to be mindful of any excessive cravings or compulsive behaviors around sugary foods and drinks.



# Different

## TYPES OF SUGAR

While it may be tempting to eliminate all sweeteners from your diet simply, it's important to note that many foods and drinks contain hidden sources of sugar that can add up quickly.

### **Granulated sugar**

This is the most commonly used type of sugar, and it's what most people think of when they think of "sugar." It's typically made from sugarcane or sugar beets and used in a wide variety of foods and drinks, from baked goods to soda.

### **Brown sugar**

This is a type of granulated sugar that has molasses added to it. It's commonly used in baking and gives baked goods a distinctive flavor.

### **Powdered sugar**

This is a fine powder made from granulated sugar that has been ground up. It's commonly used in frosting and other sweet toppings.

### **High-fructose corn syrup (HFCS)**

This is a sweetener made from corn that has been chemically altered to increase its fructose content. It's commonly used in soda and other sweetened beverages and in many processed foods.

### **Artificial sweeteners**

These are sweeteners that are chemically synthesized to mimic the taste of sugar. They include aspartame, sucralose, and saccharin, among others. While they contain no calories, there is some debate over their safety and potential health risks.

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# **NATURAL SWEETENERS**

## **Honey**

Honey is a natural sweetener that is produced by bees. It contains small amounts of vitamins and minerals and has antioxidant and antibacterial properties. Honey is often used in baking and cooking and can be added to tea or other beverages for sweetness.

## **Maple syrup**

Maple syrup is a natural sweetener that is made from the sap of maple trees. It contains antioxidants and small amounts of minerals like calcium, potassium, and iron. Maple syrup is often used in baking and cooking and can be added to oatmeal or other breakfast foods for sweetness.

## **Stevia**

Stevia is a natural sweetener that is derived from the stevia plant. It is much sweeter than sugar but contains no calories and has a negligible effect on blood sugar levels. Stevia is often used in beverages and in baking and cooking.

## **Agave nectar**

Agave nectar is a natural sweetener made from the sap of the agave plant. It is sweeter than sugar but has a lower glycemic index, meaning it has a smaller impact on blood sugar levels. Agave nectar is often used as a vegan alternative to honey.

## **Coconut sugar**

Coconut sugar is a natural sweetener that is made from the sap of coconut palms. It contains small amounts of vitamins and minerals and has a lower glycemic index than traditional sugar. Coconut sugar is often used in baking and cooking.

# Sweetener Guide

## LEVEL

# 1

### WHOLE-FOOD SUGARS

- raw honey
- real maple syrup
- molasses
- date syrup
- fruit puree

## LEVEL

# 2

### OKAY IN SMALL AMOUNTS

- coconut sugar
- stevia
- monkfruit
- xylitol
- erythritol

## LEVEL

# 3

### MINIMIZE WHEN POSSIBLE

- raw sugar
- agave syrup
- white sugar
- brown sugar

## LEVEL

# 4

### AVOID WHEN POSSIBLE

- corn syrup
- high-fructose corn syrup
- sucralose
- aspartame

# Hidden Sources

## OF SUGAR IN FOODS

Sugar is a common ingredient in many foods and drinks, but it can also be hidden in unexpected places. If you're trying to reduce your sugar intake, it's important to be aware of these hidden sources of sugar. Here are some common examples:

### Condiments

Many condiments, such as ketchup, barbecue sauce, and salad dressings, contain added sugar. Be sure to check the labels and choose sugar-free options when possible.

### Yogurt

Flavored yogurts often contain added sugar, which can quickly add up. Opt for plain yogurt and add your own fruit for sweetness.

### Cereals

Many breakfast cereals are high in sugar, even those that are marketed as healthy options. Check the labels and choose cereals with less than 5 grams of sugar per serving.

### Granola bars

Granola bars can be a convenient snack, but many contain added sugar. Look for options that are low in sugar, or make your own at home.

### Juice

Fruit juice may seem like a healthy choice, but it often contains a high amount of sugar. Opt for whole fruit instead, or dilute your juice with water.

## Energy drinks

Energy drinks are often loaded with sugar and caffeine. Choose sugar-free options or opt for coffee or tea instead.

## Baked goods

Baked goods such as muffins, cookies, and cakes are often high in sugar. Try making your own at home using natural sweeteners such as honey or maple syrup.

## Sauces and marinades

Many sauces and marinades contain added sugar. Look for sugar-free options or make your own at home using natural ingredients.

## Flavored coffee drinks

Flavored coffee drinks can be a major source of sugar and calories. Opt for black coffee or choose sugar-free options.

By being aware of these hidden sources of sugar, you can make more informed choices about what you eat and drink. It's important to read food labels carefully and choose whole, unprocessed foods whenever possible. Additionally, choosing natural sweeteners such as honey or maple syrup can be a healthier alternative to traditional sugar.



## OBVIOUS SUGAR



obvious sugar is processed, sweet-tasting and often listed on the labels

- candy
- ice cream
- cookies, cake, etc
- sweetened beverages
- syrups & jams
- baking sugar
- corn syrup

## SNEAKY SUGAR



sneaky sugar are often hidden in food products market to be "healthy"

- yogurt
- granola
- energy bars
- smoothies
- salad dressing
- nut butters
- kombucha

## PRE-SUGAR



pre-sugars do not necessarily taste sweet, but convert to glucose in your body almost immediately

- bread
- pasta
- cereal
- crackers
- puffs & pretzels
- anything with flour
- potato products

## FRUIT SUGAR



fruit sugar metabolism is aided by the fiber, enzymes and nutrients also contained in whole fruit

- low sugar fruits  
berries  
melons  
citrus
- high sugar fruits  
tropical  
grapes

# Names for sugar

## SUGAR

- beet
- brown
- cane
- confectioners
- coconut
- date
- granulated
- invert
- palm
- raw
- turbinado
- white

## SYRUP

- agave
- brown rice
- corn
- high fructose corn (HFCS)
- glucose
- malt
- maple
- sorghum

## SUGAR ALCOHOLS

- mannitol
- erythritol
- sorbitol
- xylitol
- lactitol
- isomalt
- maltitol
- hydrogenated starch hydrolysates (HSH)

## ANOTHER NAME, JUST AS SWEET

- agave nectar
- barley malt
- cane juice
- crystals
- dextrin
- evaporated/dehydrated
- cane juice
- fruit juice
- concentrate
- maltodextrin
- sucanat



*taste sweet, but not digestible*

*spot chemical names for sugar that end in "ose"*

*sugar-free substitutes can have negative effects on your metabolism & nervous system*

## ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

- acesulfame
- potassium
- advantame
- aspartame
- neotame
- saccharin
- sucralose

## SIMPLE SACCHARIDES

- dextrose
- fructose
- galactose
- glucose
- lactose
- maltose
- sucrose

## WHOLE-FOOD SUGARS

- honey
- molasses
- monk fruit (luo han guo)
- stevia
- yacon syrup

*still contain sugar, but come with nutrients & immune factors*

# The Benefits OF A ZERO SUGAR LIFESTYLE

A zero-sugar lifestyle refers to a way of eating that involves avoiding all forms of added sugars, including table sugar, honey, agave nectar, and high-fructose corn syrup. Adopting a zero-sugar lifestyle has many benefits for your health and well-being. Here are some of the most notable benefits:

## **Improved blood sugar control**

A zero-sugar lifestyle can help to stabilize your blood sugar levels, which is important for preventing type 2 diabetes and other health conditions.

## **Weight loss**

Eliminating sugar from your diet can help you lose weight since sugar is a high-calorie food that can contribute to weight gain. In addition, sugar can cause cravings and overeating, which can make it difficult to maintain a healthy weight.

## **Increased energy**

Sugar can cause fluctuations in energy levels, leading to crashes and fatigue. A zero-sugar lifestyle can help to stabilize your energy levels, leading to increased focus and productivity throughout the day.

## **Better dental health**

Sugar is a major contributor to tooth decay and gum disease. By eliminating sugar from your diet, you can improve your dental health and prevent cavities.

## Improved heart health

Consuming too much sugar can increase your risk of heart disease since it can lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and inflammation. A zero-sugar lifestyle can help to improve your heart health and reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease.

## Clearer skin

Sugar can contribute to acne and other skin conditions. By eliminating sugar from your diet, you may notice clearer, healthier-looking skin.

## Improved mood

Sugar can cause mood swings and irritability. By adopting a zero-sugar lifestyle, you may experience improved mood and reduced stress levels.

In addition to these benefits, a zero-sugar lifestyle can also help you develop a healthier relationship with food. By focusing on whole, unprocessed foods, you can learn to enjoy the natural flavors and nutrients that come from real food, rather than relying on sugary snacks and processed foods.

It's important to note that a zero-sugar lifestyle doesn't necessarily mean completely eliminating all forms of sugar from your diet. It simply means avoiding added sugars and focusing on whole, unprocessed foods. By making this change, you can experience many benefits for your health and well-being.



# Sugar-free

## GROCERY SHOPPING

If you're looking to adopt a sugar-free lifestyle, it can be challenging to know what to buy at the grocery store. Here's a shopping list of sugar-free foods to help you get started:

### PROTEINS

- Fresh or frozen meats, poultry, fish, and seafood
- Tofu and tempeh
- Eggs
- Nuts and seeds (unsweetened)

### DAIRY

- Unsweetened almond milk or other non-dairy milk
- Plain yogurt (without added sugar)
- Cheese (without added sugar)
- Cottage cheese

### FRUITS/ VEGGIES

- All fresh or frozen fruits (not canned in syrup)
- All fresh or frozen vegetables
- Canned vegetables (without added sugar)

### GRAINS

- Brown rice
- Quinoa
- Whole grain pasta
- Whole grain bread (without added sugar)
- Steel-cut oats or rolled oats

## SNACKS

- Fresh vegetables (carrots, celery, cucumbers, etc.)
- Fresh fruit
- Nuts and seeds (unsweetened)
- Whole grain crackers (no added sugar)
- Rice cakes

## BEVERAGES

- Water
- Unsweetened tea or coffee
- Unsweetened sparkling water
- Sugar-free sports drinks (if needed)

## CONDIMENTS

- Mustard
- Hot sauce
- Vinegar
- Salt and pepper
- Herbs and spices (fresh or dried)
- Olive oil or coconut oil (for cooking)

When shopping, be sure to read labels carefully and avoid any products that contain added sugars. Stick to whole, unprocessed foods whenever possible. With a little planning and preparation, you can enjoy a delicious, sugar-free diet that supports your health and well-being.

# Eating-out

## ON A SUGAR-FREE DIET

Eating out on a zero-sugar diet can be a challenge, but it's not impossible. Here are some tips for making healthier choices when dining out:

**Choose simple dishes:** Look for dishes that are based on simple, whole foods, such as grilled chicken or fish with steamed vegetables. Avoid dishes that are heavily processed or contain added sugars, such as breaded chicken or sweetened sauces.

**Skip the bread basket:** Many restaurants serve bread or rolls before the meal, but these are often high in carbohydrates and sugar. Ask your server to skip the bread basket or bring you a plate of vegetables instead.

**Ask for dressing on the side:** Salads can be a healthy choice, but many dressings contain added sugars. Ask for the dressing on the side and use it sparingly, or opt for oil and vinegar instead.

**Choose water or unsweetened beverages:** Sodas, juices, and other sweetened beverages are loaded with sugar. Stick to water, unsweetened tea or coffee, or sparkling water with a slice of lemon or lime.

**Check the menu ahead of time:** If you know you're going out to eat, check the restaurant's menu ahead of time to see what options are available. Look for dishes that are based on whole, unprocessed foods, and avoid anything that contains added sugars.

# How to **STAY MOTIVATED AND ACCOUNTABLE**

Staying motivated and accountable during a zero-sugar challenge can be tough, but there are several strategies you can use to stay on track:

## **Set clear goals**

Before you start your zero-sugar challenge, set clear goals for what you want to achieve. Write down your goals and keep them somewhere visible, such as on your fridge or bathroom mirror. Having a clear sense of purpose can help you stay motivated when the going gets tough.

## **Find a support system**

Surround yourself with people who support your goals and can help keep you accountable. This could be a friend, family member, or even an online community. Having people to talk to and share your successes (and challenges) with can make a big difference.

## **Plan ahead**

When you're on the go or busy, it can be easy to slip back into old habits. Plan ahead by packing healthy snacks or meals to take with you, and have a list of sugar-free options when you're eating out.

## **Keep a journal**

Keeping a food journal can help you stay accountable and track your progress. Write down everything you eat and how you feel afterward. Seeing your progress over time can be a powerful motivator.

## Reward yourself

When you reach a milestone or accomplish a goal, reward yourself with something you enjoy that doesn't involve sugar. This could be a massage, a new book, or a night out with friends.

## Be kind to yourself

Remember that change takes time and it's okay to slip up now and then. Don't beat yourself up over a mistake, but use it as an opportunity to learn and grow. Celebrate your successes and be kind to yourself throughout the process.

By setting clear goals, finding support, planning ahead, keeping a journal, rewarding yourself, and being kind to yourself, you can stay motivated and accountable during your zero-sugar challenge. With persistence and determination, you can achieve your goals and live a healthier, sugar-free life.



The background is a collage of images. On the left, there are pink tulips and a wooden cutting board. In the center, there are two glass jars filled with blueberries. On the right, there are two glasses of chia pudding topped with blueberries. The entire scene is set on a light-colored wooden surface.

*Sugar-free*

**HEALTHY  
DESSERTS**

# Berry Parfait

2 servings

🕒 15 minutes, plus 30 minutes to chill (optional)

*This simple and healthy parfait tastes so decadent when using heavy whipping cream. The berries give natural sweetness and look so appealing and beautiful.*



## Ingredients

½ cup heavy whipping cream (at least 35% fat)

1 tablespoon 100% pure cocoa powder

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

6 almonds, crushed

6 walnuts, crushed

3 strawberries, diced

⅓ cup raspberries

⅓ cup blackberries

10 blueberries

½ tablespoon ground flaxseed (optional)

1 teaspoon cinnamon for serving (optional)

## Method

1. Place the heavy whipping cream in a bowl and stir in the cocoa powder and vanilla extract.
2. Whip the cream with a hand mixer on medium until stiff peaks form.
3. Stir the nuts and berries into the whipped cream.
4. Mix in the ground flaxseed and sprinkle the cinnamon over the top, if desired.

# Chocolate Avocado Pudding

4 servings

🕒 15 minutes, plus 30 minutes to chill (optional)

*This recipe is a great way to satisfy your sweet tooth without using any refined sugar. Avocados provide healthy fats and fiber, while cocoa powder adds a rich chocolate flavor.*



## Ingredients

- 2 ripe avocados
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ¼ cup unsweetened almond milk
- ¼ cup honey or maple syrup
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- pinch of salt

## Method

1. Cut the avocados in half, remove the pits, and scoop out the flesh into a food processor or blender.
2. Add the cocoa powder, almond milk, honey or maple syrup, vanilla extract, and salt to the food processor or blender.
3. Process the ingredients until smooth and creamy.
4. Divide the pudding into 4 small serving dishes or jars and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes before serving.

# Berry Chia Pudding

1 serving

🕒 15 minutes, plus 30 minutes to chill (optional)

*This recipe is a great way to enjoy a sweet and fruity dessert without any added sugar. The chia seeds provide fiber and healthy fats, while the berries offer antioxidants and vitamins. The honey or maple syrup adds sweetness without the added sugar found in traditional desserts.*



## Ingredients

- 1 cup unsweetened almond milk
- ½ cup fresh or frozen mixed berries
- ¼ cup chia seeds
- 1 tbsp honey or maple syrup
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- pinch of salt

## Method

1. In a blender or food processor, combine the almond milk, berries, honey or maple syrup, vanilla extract, and salt.
2. Blend until smooth.
3. Transfer the mixture to a bowl and stir in the chia seeds.
4. Mix well and let the pudding sit for at least 10 minutes to allow the chia seeds to absorb the liquid and thicken the pudding.
5. Stir the pudding again and transfer it to small serving dishes or jars.
6. Refrigerate the pudding for at least 30 minutes before serving.
7. Top with fresh berries or chopped nuts, if desired.

# Baked Apples

4 servings

🕒 45 minutes, plus 10 minutes to chill (optional)

*This recipe is a great way to enjoy the natural sweetness of apples without any added sugar. The spices and nuts add a delicious flavor and texture to the dish. It's a perfect dessert for fall or winter, but can be enjoyed any time of the year.*



## Ingredients

---

4 medium apples,  
cored and sliced

¼ cup chopped  
walnuts

2 tsp ground  
cinnamon

¼ tsp ground nutmeg

¼ tsp ground ginger

¼ tsp salt

2 tbsp unsalted butter,  
melted

## Method

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. Mix the chopped walnuts, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and salt in a small bowl.
3. Arrange the sliced apples in a baking dish and sprinkle the walnut mixture.
4. Drizzle the melted butter over the apples and walnut mixture.
5. Cover the baking dish with foil and bake for 20 minutes.
6. Remove the foil and bake for 10-15 minutes, until the apples are soft and tender.

# Berry Crumble

2 servings

🕒 35 minutes, plus 10 minutes to chill (optional)

*This sugar-free berry crumble is a delicious and healthy dessert that is easy to make. It uses almond flour and rolled oats as a base for the crumble topping, and coconut oil instead of butter. The mixed berries provide natural sweetness and antioxidants, while cinnamon adds warmth and flavor.*



## Ingredients

---

2 cups mixed berries  
(fresh or frozen)  
¼ cup almond flour  
¼ cup rolled oats  
¼ cup chopped nuts  
(such as almonds,  
pecans, or walnuts)  
2 tbsp coconut oil  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
1 tsp cinnamon  
Pinch of salt

## Method

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C).
2. In a mixing bowl, combine the berries and 1/2 tsp of cinnamon. Mix well and pour the mixture into a baking dish.
3. In another mixing bowl, combine the almond flour, oats, nuts, coconut oil, vanilla extract, 1/2 tsp of cinnamon, and a pinch of salt. Mix well until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
4. Spread the crumble mixture evenly over the berries.
5. Bake for 25-30 minutes.
6. Remove from the oven and let cool for a few minutes before serving.

# Peanut Butter Cookies

4 servings

🕒 35 minutes, plus 10 minutes to chill (optional)

*These cookies are a healthy and delicious dessert option that's free of refined sugar. The peanut butter provides protein and healthy fats, while the oats provide fiber and complex carbohydrates.*



## Ingredients

---

- 1 cup natural peanut butter
- ½ cup unsweetened almond milk
- ¼ cup honey or maple syrup
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- 2 cups rolled oats
- ¼ cup chopped peanuts (optional)

## Method

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine the peanut butter, almond milk, honey or maple syrup, and vanilla extract. Mix until smooth.
2. Add the rolled oats to the bowl and stir until well combined.
3. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
4. Using a cookie scoop or spoon, drop the dough onto the baking sheet and flatten each cookie with a fork.
5. Sprinkle the chopped peanuts on top of each cookie, if desired.
6. Refrigerate the cookies for at least 30 minutes before serving.



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Somer Schreiber Small, FNP-C, APRN has been in the healthcare field for over 20 years and has worked in several areas, including acute care, cardiac telemetry, dialysis, and in post-acute care. Somer Schreiber Small's, FNP-C, APRN most recent work is in seeing patients at several post-acute care facilities, where she utilizes her experience to help patients maintain a healthy lifestyle and mitigate the effects of disease. She also has a part time weight loss, BHRT and functional medicine practice. Somer Schreiber, Small, FNP-C, APRN has a passion for helping people achieve their healthcare goals and is a compassionate and caring provider.

Somer Schreiber-Small, FNP-C, APRN is excited about promoting wellness to patients in her community.

When Somer Schreiber-Small, FNP-C, APRN is not working, she spends time with her family, and enjoys traveling to new places.

*Somer Schreiber-Small, FNP-C*

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## LET'S CONNECT



## LET'S CONNECT



*Thank You!*

We specialize in medical weight loss, bioidentical hormone therapy, thyroid optimization, adrenal testing, functional medicine including gut health, genetic functional labs, food allergy/sensitivity testing, and root cause medicine. For questions, consultations, or discussions about your Treatment needs, we are here to engage. Below you will find our contact details, along with directions to our office.

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