

Hi, My Name Is Dorothy, and I'm a Sugar Addict
by Dorothy Rice

"Well, that's a pretty sweet habit," people say, when I tell them I'm hooked on sugar.

It isn't. It's been said that sugar is as addictive as cocaine. And unlike cocaine, it's legal, cheap and plentiful. If you're a user, you don't have a taste of heroin, a little bit of booze or meth. It's no different with sugar. Given the right combination of supply, time and privacy, I will consume every ounce I can lay hands to, and I'll do it fast. Hardly tasting after the first few mouthfuls. Until I make myself sick and descend into a nightmare-ridden digestive stupor.

I can easily gain ten pounds in a month, without pregnancy or a thyroid condition to blame. One six-month dental check-up, I had eleven cavities. The dentist asked if I'd been crunching hard candies in my sleep. I hadn't. But I do sometimes doze with buttery caramels melting in my mouth.

Triggers for sugar-binging abound, but Halloween through New Year's, the sanctioned over-eating season, is the worst. This past year proved epic. I was in a funk, a combination of seasonal affective disorder, empty nest blues, belated mid-life crisis, and, on top of all that, the nightmare of US politics. Compelling reasons to need "a little something to take the edge off" were as close as the morning paper.

My husband, Bob, always buys our annual supply of Halloween candy. I reminded him to pick a kind that wouldn't tempt me.

"Get something gummy or sour," I said. "Why would I buy that crap?"

"Well, anything but chocolate, *please*." "Oh, I'm getting chocolate."

"At least hide it," I said. "And not in one of your usual places." "Oh, come on. A little chocolate every day is good for you."

Bob is one of those people who can eat one piece, then walk away. Incomprehensible.

Two weeks before Halloween, I returned from running errands. His car was in the drive. I looked for him in his office and there they were. Two jumbo sacks of assorted chocolates, in plain sight on his desk. 120 pieces each. 240 mini candy bars in all. I hefted one sack, then the other, probing for holes in the plastic, heart pounding, simultaneously relieved and bereft not to find any.

It was possible he'd just gotten home and hadn't had time to hide the candy. I made a mental note to remind him. But I never did. As we ate dinner, watched TV, did the dishes, I pictured the candy bars in their shiny wrappers, waiting in the dark, sending out their scent, whispering my name.

I wish I craved sex the way I do sweets. Indiscriminate sex has its consequences, but it doesn't rot your teeth, ruin your health or pack on the pounds. Usually.

I'm 64. A nutritionist calculated my weight, measurements and percentage of body fat and blithely informed me that my metabolic age is 85. No sugar-coating those numbers. I am resigned to a wardrobe of black, elastic waist-band trousers and voluminous tunics that provide chin-to-knee coverage.

For days, I resisted those sacks of candy. But the instant I discovered a tiny hole in one—proof that Bob had started the sampling—my resolve crumbled. I selected one each of the four varieties. Settling into my favorite corner of the couch, I prepared to savor them, then get on with my day. But, like a scratch you can't quite reach, they weren't as satisfying as I'd anticipated. The next four went down faster than the first. I returned to the bag again and again, snitching a few each time, telling myself they would be the last.

The last dozen disappeared in a frenzy, fingers in frantic motion, tearing and shoving, crunching and swallowing, my world reduced to the sensations in my mouth, gone too quickly, demanding more, more. My stomach lurched. The couch was littered with twisted wrappers, my pajama top stained with bits of chocolate, slowly melting from the heat of my body.

Stuffed, nauseous, I buried the wrappers in the trash and stretched out on the couch. Crashing hard, I nodded off. Anything I'd hoped to accomplish would have to wait on the digestive process.

The next morning, a devastating migraine hit. I passed the day in my darkened bedroom, promising a god I only thought of at moments like these that I would never eat half a jumbo sack of Halloween candy again.

Yet over the next few days, I finished it off and started on the second bag.

My gluttony last Halloween, and always, ends in slothfulness. That part's simple biology. Then shame and regret descend, spawning envy and wrath for the self-disciplined and preternaturally slim. Damn them. Pride keeps me at it; I can, I *will*, put whatever I damn well like in my mouth. As for lust and greed, well, food-porn fuels my fantasies. For me, the seven deadly sins are embodied in a candy wrapper. There is no such thing as just one.

Growing up, sugary treats were doled out as rewards and to keep us quiet. They marked milestones and special occasions. If we skinned a knee or lost a friend, we were offered a lollipop. After childhood, the landscape changed, particularly for girls. Our mothers pointed out the twiggy girls we should emulate if we wanted to be popular, to find love. But by adolescence it was too late. Like so many, I was already a closet emotional eater. Sugar was my medicine, one that eased the pain, until it caused it.

If there is a god who conceived these temptations to test us, did she foresee how prevalent they would become—sugar is in virtually all prepared foods—and how pervasive the need to self-medicate, how popular culture would glorify excess? If she can see me eating myself numb, can she forgive me? Can I?

At least I can't be jailed for it. Yet. There is that. And I can detox. Again.