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SUGAR SCRUB: How Sweet It Is

BY: DENISE REYNOLDS

Though sugar has all but disappeared from today's low-carb lifestyles, you'll be glad to know that you can still get your sweet revenge without worrying about calorie or carb counts. The secret is in surrendering to the lure of sugar's delectable delights without ever taking a bite.

Sugar may not be the darling of nutritionists, but its value in spa circles is legendary. Ideally suited to its task, sugar is a gentle exfoliant that buffs away dead skin with dual action provided by its granules and natural acids. Rich in alpha hydroxy acids, sugar stimulates cellular renewal, reviving dull, lackluster skin. Thanks to its small molecular structure, the sugar's glycolic acid penetrates skin deeply, improving skin tone and texture. It supplies excellent softening, hydrating, and moisturizing, boosting collagen production to improve firmness and elasticity.

Unlike salt scrubs, the sugar base ensures that sensitive skin areas aren't irritated, and won't sting any cuts or scratches you may have. It's a terrific treatment to do before sunless tanning, or anytime you want irresistibly soft, kissable skin.

To experience this sweet treat, I head for Louisiana, a top sugar producing state, where I book a Magnolia Sugar Scrub at The Spa at The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans. The aroma of magnolias fills the air with reminders of the genteel history of the French Quarter. The décor reflects the gracious surroundings of its century-old Maison Blanche building, authentically restored with subdued lighting, gauze-draped walls, and sparkling chandeliers. Softly bubbling fountains, gilded ceilings, and museum-quality artwork surround spa guests as they rest on sumptuously upholstered chaise lounges in the relaxation lounge, awaiting their treatments. With an atmosphere this serene, it's no wonder guests return here to while away the day after their spa treatments are complete.

All too soon my therapist arrives to usher me into a private wet room. Fluffy white towels cover a massage table where I position myself face down. Smaller towels are lightly draped over my body for modesty. Overhead, a seven-headed Vichy shower starts, quietly cascading warm

water over my body like a summer rain. The water stops as my therapist dips her hand into the sugar scrub, a custom blend of indigenous white sugar and magnolia oil.

Combining circular motions with longer massage strokes, she spreads the scrub onto my body. Working her way up one leg, she applies additional pressure to traditionally rough spots like my heels. The other leg receives equal time as she continues toward my back. Slowly proceeding to my shoulders, she rounds the corner and works her way down one arm, lingering on my elbow, another common trouble spot. Before finishing with a light scrub of my entire back side, my other arm happily receives its turn.

Turning the Vichy shower back on, she slowly moves the shower heads back and forth to dissolve the sugar before she turns me over onto my back. Placing a pillow beneath my neck, she continues to lightly wet my skin with the shower. Returning to my feet, she rubs the sugar scrub on my legs, then my abdomen, arms and décolleté. Along with the final Vichy rinse, she uses a handheld shower wand, completely removing the excess sugar scrub.

Covering my body with a dry towel, she bends me forward at the waist and rolls up the wet towels and a hidden plastic liner underneath them, exposing a dry towel for me to lie back down on as she removes the wet towels from the table beneath my lower body. Softly patting me dry, she completes the treatment by applying magnolia soufflé lotion.

Feeling as smooth as a baby's bottom, and smelling like a creamy white magnolia blossom, I don my robe and slippers and retire to the relaxation room, where I find an intimate niche and recline on the same sofa I left just an hour before. Except this time, I'm feeling just a little bit sweeter.

Spa specialist Denise Reynolds, whose column "Spa Pleasures" brings you reports on spa treatments from around the world, invites you to visit www.spapleasures.com for more information on the pleasures that await you at today's spas. Copyright © 2005