

# Curb Your Cravings to LIVE MORE HEALTHFULLY



## Curb Your Cravings to Live More Healthfully

Food cravings, we've all experienced them. Whether it's an overwhelming need for a sweet treat, a yearning for something salty or the desire to have a pizza loaded with gooey cheese, food cravings are part of our lives.

Most of us know that sugary snacks and over-indulgence in alcohol isn't good for our health. There have been dozens of studies showing the effects of these types of foods on our bodies. So why then, if we know the harmful effects, do we still crave these and other foods?

There are many reasons that cause us to crave certain foods.

Food cravings are unlike physical hunger, which develops over time. Cravings come out of the blue and can strike you quickly. They can be triggered by many things like stress, boredom, emotions or just the scent or sight of certain foods.

Some believe cravings are psychological while others believe they are brought on by nutritional deficiencies in our daily diet. Emotional stressors can cause cravings of certain comfort foods while a physical addiction to foods or ingredients, like sugar may be to blame.

Junk food manufacturers and advertisers have learned to tap into our need for certain foods. Manufacturers have learned to create products that fill our need for salty or sugary foods. Advertisers have used our trigger points as a way to sell us more to feed our food cravings.

However, the blame can't be put onto manufacturers and advertisers alone. There are several reasons why we crave certain foods. In this report, we'll look at what's causing our cravings and how we can control them as well as specific alternatives to try instead of the specific food.

This report also discusses the harmful effects food cravings can have on our bodies and how you can curb your cravings to live more healthfully.

Let's get started.



## What Causes Cravings

If food cravings are so bad for us, what causes them? Is it physical or mental or something else entirely? That depends.

It's all in your head or is it? People who don't have food cravings might believe your food cravings are all in your head. However, in some cases they may be right. There are certain areas, according to research, that specific areas of our brains are responsible for food cravings. Our memory factors and the area responsible for sensing pleasure are two of those areas.

- There are three areas of the brain - the hippocampus, insula, and caudate - appear to be activated during food-craving episodes, according to research from the Monell Chemical Senses Center. According to their brain tests, these memory areas of the brain are important to food cravings.
- Food cravings can be caused by emotions and desires. We often crave certain types of food when we are stressed or anxious. Carbohydrates boost the hormone serotonin, which has a calming effect on our body.
- A lack of variety in our diets can lead to food cravings. If you eat the same foods every day, like when you are on a very restricted diet, your body craves the foods you are no longer eating.
- Certain activities, people, or places can often trigger a craving for certain foods. For example, Friday nights might be movie night with your family. That could also mean it's pizza and popcorn night. Your body doesn't necessarily need pizza every Friday, but you've conditioned yourself to crave it on movie night.
- Vitamin or mineral deficiencies in your diet can cause food cravings. Many people who eat a lot of processed foods are suffering from mild malnutrition because they are not getting the nutrients they need from whole, nutrient filled foods.
- Addiction may be causing you to crave certain foods. Aside from alcohol, sugar is the one most people seem to have trouble with. Certain foods stimulate the reward center of your brain in the same way drugs as cocaine does. These foods allow your body to release "feel good" hormones every time you eat them.

There is no simple answer to why you have food cravings. Everyone is different and cravings can be caused by several different reasons. If you are stressed, you may have a craving for sugar, which in turn stimulates an addiction like need for sweets.

## Cravings can be Harmful

According to a study published by the US National Library of Medicine's National Institute of Health on the effects of cravings and depression, they found that, "Fast-food and commercial baked goods consumption may have a detrimental effect on depression risk." In other words, eating junk food may be linked to an increase in depression. Cravings can have many harmful effects on you.

1. Weight gain – Eating excessive amounts of sugar, processed foods, fatty foods, drinking alcohol, and consuming salt can add extra pounds to even the healthiest person.
2. Health issues – Salty and fatty foods can both lead to high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Sugary foods like diet soft drinks can lead to heart attacks, dangerous blood clots and other cardiovascular problems.
3. Alcohol cravings – Craving alcohol can lead to physical problems like liver disease, gout, cancer, pancreas and the immune system.
4. Dental problems – Sugary, processed foods as well as alcohol can all lead to dental problems ranging from tooth decay to gum disease.
5. Psychological issues – Trying to control your craving for certain foods and not being able to stop can lead to thoughts of low self-esteem, believing something is wrong with you and other thought issues.

Cravings foods can be harmful to your physical and mental health in many ways. It's important to learn how to overcome these cravings in healthy ways.

## **Overcoming Cravings**

Now that you know why you are craving certain foods, it's time to find ways to overcome them. Overcoming cravings might seem simple but it can be one of the hardest things to do.

Here are the latest tricks from researchers and experts:

### **Avoid your triggers.**

"You crave what you eat, so if you switch what you're eating, you can weaken your old cravings and strengthen new ones," says Marcia Pelchat, PhD, of the Monell Center. Gradually cutting out and avoiding what you are craving helps you to begin to want them less.

### **Do away with temptation.**

Go through your kitchen pantry and get rid of all the foods that you crave. If you bought a box of cookies on your last shopping trip, throw them out (or give them away).

### **Munch on nuts.**

Eat an ounce of nuts with two glasses of water to help you overcome your craving. The crunchy will satisfy your need to chew and the water will make you feel full.

### **Let go of stress.**

Stress is a huge reason for cravings. Learning how to reduce and deal with the daily stress in your life can help you overcome food cravings. Look for different techniques like deep breathing or exercising that can help.

### **Take a power nap.**

Are you tired? Cravings often become strong when we're fatigued. Take a quick power nap to re-energize.

### **Keep your hands and mind busy.**

Food cravings can be triggered by boredom. Find activities to keep your hands and your mind busy.

### **Sniff scented oil.**

Scent is a powerful sense. It can affect our emotions in many ways. Use scented oils to help you reduce anxiety, calm you or to curb your appetite.



### **Chew Gum.**

Keeping your mouth busy with gum or even tea tree toothpicks can help reduce the desire to eat mindlessly.

### **Have a cup of tea.**

Take a few moments to sip a cup of warm black tea. Sipping something warm has calming effect that combats cravings.

### **Indulge – within limits.**

It's okay to indulge occasionally as long as you don't overdo it. Don't go for a whole pint of ice cream. Instead, have one scoop at your favorite ice cream shop. Instead of buying a large box of cookies, try purchase single 100-calorie packs. That way you aren't tempted to reach for more bags or a whole box.

### **Lift any bans.**

If you're eating a very limited number of calories, 1000 or less a day or are restricting entire food groups like carbs, you're more likely to have food cravings. Plan to enjoy a smaller portion of your favorite foods. Share a slice of cake with a friend instead of the whole cake by yourself.

### **Eliminate habits.**

Are you a creature of habit? Do you have to have pizza on movie night or ice cream after dinner? Instead, on movie night, why not fix a healthy dinner together with your family to eat while watching the movie? Instead of having ice cream every evening, why not go for a walk instead?

The above ideas are a general guide in overcoming most food cravings. Whenever a craving hits, ask yourself why you are craving it and what you can do instead to overcome it.

### **Specific cravings:**

Certain foods or food type cravings can be more difficult to overcome than others can. Sugar, alcohol, carbohydrates, and caffeine are some of the top offenders. Here are some of the more specific cravings and alternative to help overcome them.

## **Sugar**

Sugar is found in a vast amount of foods and drinks; from easily recognizable items such as candy bars and soft drinks to seemingly healthy foods like power bars and granola. Eliminating it from your diet will take a bit of detective work and diligence.



### **Overcoming your sugar cravings:**

- Eat a little bit of a sugary food, such as a fun-size candy bar. Enjoying a small amount of what you love helps you from feeling denied.
- Try combining the food your craving with a healthy one. Dip a banana in melted chocolate for example. Alternatively, mix almonds with bits of a chocolate bar.
- Cut out all simple sugar cold turkey. It may take 48 to 72 hours before the cravings start to diminish, but over time, your craving for the taste of sugar will become satisfied with alternatives.
- Chew gum to avoid giving into a sugar craving.
- Eat more fruit and nuts. Fruit is naturally sweet and you get the healthy fiber and nutrients from them.
- Go for a walk. When sugar cravings hit get up and do something to change the scenery to take your mind off the craving.
- Be sure you are eating regularly. Often a sugar craving comes on when our blood sugar becomes unstable. Waiting longer than 5 hours between meals sets you up for sugar cravings. Try to eat a protein, fiber-rich meal every three to five hours.

### **Alternatives to satisfy sugar craving**

- Plain frozen yogurt with fresh fruit
- A small portion of dark chocolate
- Fresh fruit, fruit kabobs, or a fruit smoothie
- Dried fruit
- Chewing gum
- Mashed sweet potatoes
- Light chocolate milk
- Peanut butter and jelly on whole wheat

- Baked apple stuffed with nuts and oats
- Frozen bananas, grapes, peaches or other fruit
- Coconut water
- Flavored tea, water
- Nuts with honey drizzled on top
- Corn, cherry tomatoes, baby carrots
- Dill pickles
- Squash fries
- Light gelatin
- Popcorn with dark chocolate pieces

## **Caffeine**

Caffeinated drinks are a staple for many. From our first sip of coffee in the morning to a glass of tea with dinner, it seems we are constantly flooding our bodies with caffeine.

### **Overcoming caffeine cravings:**

- Get enough rest. Make the time to relax and get enough sleep.
- Change your wake up time and morning routine in small ways. Take a walk first thing in the morning. Drink room temperature water with a twist of lemon. Do simple stretching to wake each part of your body.
- Use positive affirmations to begin your day.
- Switch to decaffeinated alternatives like flavored water or herbal tea.
- When the craving for caffeine hits you, do something different or drink something different. If the craving comes first thing in the morning, grab a bottle of water and go for a run instead.
- Don't drink caffeine simply because everyone else is. Make a conscious effort to make a better choice.
- Drink sparkling water if you crave soda.
- Boost your B vitamin intake. B vitamins are what your body uses to metabolize the food you eat and are essential for the production of energy. Upping your B vitamin levels can



help you do away with caffeine if you crave it for the energy boost. Try eating more lean meats, nuts, seeds, eggs, and fortified grains.

#### **Alternatives to caffeine:**

- Water, sparkling water, flavored water
- Decaffeinated versions of coffee, tea, soda, sports drinks
- Herbal teas such as ginseng
- Teccino caffeine-free herbal coffee
- Yerbe Mate
- Green tea
- Licorice tea
- Wheatgrass juice
- Reishi Mushroom tea
- Rooibos tea

#### **Salt**

It's no secret that salt can boost food's flavor and is important to the body, in small amounts. However, you may be getting a lot more salt in your diet than you realize.

#### **Overcoming salt craving:**

- Stay away from processed foods. Almost all processed foods have some form of sodium. A better alternative is to make your own snacks and meals. Baked sweet potato chips with parmesan are a tasty alternative to processed potato chips.
- Stay away from fast food whenever possible.
- Use herbs as an alternative to salt when cooking.
- Drink plenty of water. Stay hydrated.
- Reduce stress to keep your emotional salt craving under control.
- Pay attention to how you're feeling when your salt craving hits. Are you bored, anxious, angry, or lonely?
- Get a nutrition checkup. Find out what minerals and nutrients you may be missing in your diet. Once you start replacing them with healthy versions your salt cravings will become less.





### **Alternatives to salt:**

- Pistachios and other unsalted nuts
- Herbs like cilantro, parsley, dill, basil, and oregano
- Sunflower seeds and other seeds
- Cheesy kale chips
- Tamari-seasoned rice crackers
- Air popped popcorn tossed with olive oil and chili powder.
- Spicy wheat pretzels
- Pickles
- Olives
- Cheese
- Hummus

### **Alcohol**

In certain limited situations, alcohol can be beneficial. However, there are many more unhealthy situations and concerns related to drinking alcohol. Alcoholism and medicine interactions are two of the many issues.

### **Overcoming alcohol cravings:**

- Recognize your "triggers". External triggers include people places, things, or time of day. Knowing your triggers helps you to avoid them.
- Internal triggers can be from emotions or even nutrition deficiencies. When you have an urge to drink, think about what you are feeling. Are you sad, frustrated, or nervous? Try to avoid these situations.
- Keep alcohol out of your home.
- Avoid activities that involve drinking whenever possible.
- Remind yourself why you are limiting alcohol.
- Talk to someone when you can't handle the craving. Contact your sponsor, a trusted friend, or a family member who understands.



- Distract yourself with healthy activities like lifting weights, meditating, or watching short videos online.
- Eat a healthy meal three times a day.

### **Alternatives to alcohol**

1. Non-alcoholic beers and wines
2. Coffee and tea
3. Fresh fruit and vegetables, more proteins
4. Going for a walk, swim or other exercise
5. Taking a long relaxing bath
6. Spending quality time with your kids and family
7. Listening to your favorite music
8. Learn a new skill or hobby like cooking or drawing
9. Volunteer

### **Carbohydrates**

In your body, carbohydrates convert into sugar. You may find that carbohydrates give you a similar craving to that of candy or other sweets.



### **Overcoming carbohydrate cravings**

- Get rid of all white flour products including white bread, white rice, instant mashed potatoes, crackers, potato chips, processed pasta, and muffins.
- Empty the freezer of French fries, hash browns and premade breakfast foods like frozen waffles.
- Stock up on 100 percent whole grains like whole-wheat bread and old-fashioned oatmeal.
- Experiment with new grains like barley, millet, amaranth, whole-wheat couscous or bulgur.
- Pack lunches and snacks with healthy foods like cheese.
- When a carb craving hits, ask yourself what you really want. Are you just trying to fill an emotional need? Do you want something creamy, sweet, or cold? Do you want something crunchy or chewy?
- Find alternative activities. Get a manicure, clean your closets, or spend time playing a game with your kids when a craving hits.

- Eat breakfast every day and don't skip meals.
- Take supplements like HTP-5 and Glutamine. Add vitamins like Biotin and Riboflavin.
- Eat more protein to stay satisfied longer.
- Add flavor with spices and sauces.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Fix your gut by eliminating foods you are intolerant to such as dairy or gluten.

### **Alternatives to carbohydrates**

- Lettuce wraps instead of bread
- Portobello mushroom "buns"
- Eggplant or zucchini for pasta
- Butternut squash, turnips and carrots instead of French fries
- Cauliflower in place of mac and cheese or mashed potatoes
- Oatmeal
- Shirataki noodles
- Fresh, raw vegetables
- Eat cooked eggs like a boiled egg for a snack
- Sardines, and nuts (almonds, peanuts, pecans, walnuts) make great snacks
- Add more beans, cauliflower, bananas, and mushrooms to your dishes.

Each particular food or food type has its own specific triggers. Knowing what triggers your food craving and how to overcome it will help you get past the urge. There are healthy alternatives to every craving type as well.

## One Last Thing

Food cravings aren't as simple as some may believe. People are often told to use willpower or simply stop eating certain foods. However, cravings are often rooted in psychological, physical, or emotional needs. The first step to curbing your cravings is to figuring out what causes them and then why you can't control the urges.

Outside factors such as manufacturers and advertising media have an effect on cravings. Sugar, salt, and the carbohydrates in processed foods make you want more. However, these aren't the only reasons cravings can grab you when you least expect them.

They can be the result of a lack in nutrients or the environment we live in. It could be stress, emotions or conditioning that makes us crave different foods.

Cravings can be harmful in several ways. Some of the more common problems include weight gain, which can lead to high blood pressure, stroke, or heart disease. Another harmful outcome of cravings is addiction. Foods like sugar, and anything that breaks down into sugar such as alcohol, can be addictive and very difficult to be without.

There is good news though. Cravings can be controlled with hard work and changes in your diet and habits.

For instance, if you normally eat lots of processed foods, begin cooking your own meals to help control the amount of sugar, salt, and fats. Take advantage of fresh herbs and spices to add more flavor to your meals. Filling up on savory healthy meals every three hours or so will help curb your cravings.

Control your environment and the people you associate with as well. If you have trouble saying no in social situations, you may need to find new activities.

In the end, curbing your cravings can help you lead a healthy lifestyle.



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