Conquering Cravings from the Cubicle to the Couch

CHRISTINA MEYER-JAX MS, RD
PRINCIPAL NUTRITION SCIENTIST
SCHWAN'S SHARED SERVICES
Let’s get after this!

- Food cravings and over eating...how to win the battle
- Smart food and activity swaps to keep you motivated at work and at home
- How to plan your successful eating day that’s tasty and healthy
Chocolate
- Consistently the No. 1 most craved food.
- Contains mood-altering chemicals including phenylethylamine (rises naturally when people are in love).
- Also has theobromine (a mild stimulant), tyramine and tryptophan (antidepressant precursors that create a sense of calm).

Salty Snacks (including chips, popcorn, pretzels)
- People and animals crave salt at times of stress.
- Crunchy textures may provide an outlet for anger.
- Often eaten socially, with alcohol, lowering resistance to cravings.

Bread and Pasta
- Eating starches can boost a carb-craver’s mood in about 20 minutes, studies show.

Meat and Chicken
- Desire for a steak is more likely due to the salt, fat, smoke and other savory flavors.
- The rich, mouth-feel of meat is known as “umami,” created by receptors for L-glutamate on the tongue.

100% of women and 75% of men aged 18 to 36 report having at least one food craving in the past year.

TO RESIST THE URGE:
- Identify the taste. Imagining it can sometimes satisfy the urge.
- Take a deep whiff of an item like jasmine or peppermint to distract sensory circuits.
- Exercise for a quick endorphin fix.
- Allow yourself a small amount, only in the middle of a meal or immediately after.

Pizza
- Men typically crave ‘meal’ foods more than women do.
- Cheese and salami contain even more feel-good chemicals than chocolate.

Ice Cream
- Like chocolate, a highly tasty food that activates brain’s reward circuits.
- Fat provides comfort. Sugar provides an energy boost.
Understanding the Causes of Food Cravings

- Biochemistry
- Emotions
- Exercise & Activity
- Stress
- Sleep
- Toxic Food Environment
Biochemistry—It’s not a lack of Willpower

- The true solution to compulsive eating comes from understanding the biochemistry of your cravings, hunger, and addictive pattern of eating.

- Once you take on personal responsibility for your biochemistry, you take charge of your cravings and compulsive eating.

- Blood sugar control (why is sugar addictive?)
- Gut flora
- Low levels of neurotransmitters (serotonin, dopamine)
- Dehydration
- Alcohol
- Nutritional Deficiencies
As weight goes up, pleasure centers of the brain get more resistant...need a bigger “hit”

Over-eating (high fat and sugar foods) eventually causes loss of dopamine in the brain and a decrease in receptors in charge of satiety – so ultimately you crave more and more and never feel satisfied.

Recent study found cravings to be highest at 8pm. Lowest at 8am. (circadian rhythm set up for ancestors)

Ever wonder why you overeat when stressed out? The stress hormone, cortisol, triggers the body to produce extra ghrelin. That ghrelin works on the brain’s pleasure centers to calm you down, but you pay the price in extra weight, because it drives hunger.

Women are biologically more inclined to have food cravings tied to physical and chemical differences in the brain.
Help boost dopamine levels? Tyrosine

- Fava beans
- Duck
- Chicken
- Ricotta cheese
- Oatmeal
- Mustard greens
- Edamame
- Dark chocolate
- Seaweed
- Wheat germ
Late Night Snacking

- Suggestibility (TV ads)
- Boredom/Restlessness/Insomnia
- Self-denial
- Nutritional Imbalance
- Emotions (grief, frustration, sadness, happy)
- Procrastination
- Lack of outdoor time

- Decrease media with food. Brush teeth early
- Calming tea, reading
- Planned indulgence
- Well balanced diet
- Work on dealing with issues and channeling into healthy activities (yoga, hot bath)
- Get outside...vitamin D important for emotional balance
Food Craving Strategies

- **Don’t skip meals.** Research has shown that meal-skippers consume just as many calories (often more) each day than those who never skip a meal. Those calories tend to come in the form of binges on carb-rich, refined foods, which then cause you to crave more refined foods.

- **Clean out your cupboards.** Remove any junk food that you tend to crave. If it’s not available, you’ll be less likely to eat it in a moment of weakness.

- **Protein is your friend.** Eating protein provides long-lasting energy and controls blood sugar. Protein also helps maintain lean body mass.

- **Allow yourself simple pleasures.** Deprivation will lead you down a road toward binging. Plan ahead and keep it portion controlled or find other breaks in the day to do things you like.

- **Take one day at a time.** It can be daunting to think of weeks and months of following a strict nutrition plan. So don’t. Instead, focus on what you eat *today.*

“IF YOU KEEP GOOD FOOD IN YOUR FRIDGE, YOU WILL EAT GOOD FOOD”
- ERRICK McADAMS
Smart Swaps

Instead of apple pie...
Try... baked apples. To make, bake a small apple and top with 2 tbsp low-fat plain yogurt sprinkled with cinnamon. You'll get the same tart taste sans the fatty butter from the crust.

Instead of potato chips and dip...
Try... multi-grain pita chips with hummus. The hummus makes for a protein-rich dip, and healthy whole-grain chips tend to have less total saturated fat than potato chips.

Instead of French fries...
Try... baked sweet potato fries. To make, bake sliced sweet potatoes drizzled with olive oil at 425 degrees Fahrenheit until lightly browned (about 30 minutes). Sweet potatoes or yams have less bad fat and deliver beta-carotene for healthy eyes.

Instead of cheesecake...
Try... low-fat Greek yogurt with fresh fruit like blueberries or strawberries and graham cracker crumbles. One cup of Greek yogurt has about 23 grams of protein, which helps build metabolism-boosting muscle.
Cubicle Cravings Crushed

- Raw, unsalted nuts (walnuts, almonds)
- Real food granola bars (ProBars, Go Macro, KIND)
- Tea (get some fun flavors)
- Bubbly water and cut up fruit (citrus...energizing)
- Single serve pack of oatmeal
- Angie’s Boom Chica Pop
- Justin’s Nut Butter Packets
- String cheese
- Fruit (Clementine, Apple, Grapefruit)
- Hard Boiled Eggs
- Veggies and Hummus
- Half and Avocado and Pico
- Caprese Salad
- Frozen Greek Yogurt Tube

- Try a healthy snack subscription service (NatureBox)
- Pre-portion before bringing to the office
- Champion healthy snacks at office events
- Avoid office sabotage...you can say no nicely 😊
- Standing work stations and walking meetings
Changing Habits

- You crave what you eat! Research shows that switching diet to whole foods (fruits, veggies, nuts, lean meats, unprocessed whole grains) after 5 days, cravings decrease. After 2 weeks, most cravings are gone.

"The food you eat can be either the safest & most powerful form of medicine or the slowest form of poison."

Ann Wigmore
Daily Plan to Conquer Cravings

- Reflect and make a plan
- Ideally get 7-8 hours of sleep
- Eat Breakfast (fiber, protein) within 1 hour of waking
- Drink Water and/or flavored tea
- Eat at least 2 small snacks (protein, fiber, flavor)
- Make sure one of the snacks is around 1-2 hours before you head home
- Bring on the spices and herbs (Coriander, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and cardamom will naturally sweeten your foods and reduce cravings)
- Mindfully Eat Lunch
- Get Active

- Pack snacks ahead of time
- Cook and try new foods/flavors
- Decide if the food is worth it
- Aromatherapy
- Have an exit strategy
- Craving strikes...set a timer (10-20 minutes)
- Eat a real meal for dinner...not a snack buffet
- Have a bit of chocolate or fruit right after dinner
- Brush teeth after dinner...less likely to indulge in mindless grazing (gum works well too)
- Take time for quiet (breathing)
Principles of Intuitive Eating

- **Learn to recognize** mild sensations of hunger that emerge even while you are busy doing something else, and feed them before you become ravenous or become tempted to make unhealthy eating choices.
- **Give yourself permission** to eat whenever you feel hungry, and let go of internal feelings of guilt or rigid rules that say you can’t eat more than a certain number of calories a day or enjoy a slice of cake.
- **Derive pleasure and satisfaction from the eating experience** moment by moment, without distraction, and savor your food. Notice when and how your hunger abates. While you are eating, do not watch television, work at the computer or think about your plans for the rest of the day. Instead, look at your food, observing color, shape, taste, smell, texture and quality. Observe your own sensations and reactions.
- **After a meal is done, take some time to focus on your inner feelings** — sluggish or energized, anxious or calm? Decide whether the meal and its contents are worth eating again.
- **Don’t eat to alleviate anxiety, boredom or depression.** If you find yourself overeating to treat a mood or emotion instead of to satisfy physiological hunger, search for the emotional root of the problem and then soothe or stimulate yourself through yoga, a long walk or a talk with a friend.
- **Exercise and move for enjoyment** — not expressly for weight loss or calorie burning.
- **Notice how you feel when you choose healthy, high-quality food.** Take stock of your physical, mental and emotional responses.
- **Keep caveats in mind.** Many integrative health experts point out that the foods we most crave are sometimes those to which we are allergic or intolerant. If you suffer from this sort of food “addiction,” be aware that feeding it may make your cravings worse.
Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.
Thank You!