

KICK YOUR CRAVINGS

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“After dinner is a really bad time for me,” my new client explained with an exasperated tone. She was describing a typical day’s meals and when she got past the final meal, it truly did feel to her like it was the last supper! “I know I’m not hungry because I just ate, but I find myself grabbing snacky, salty, crunchy, fatty foods, and I before I know it, I’ve eaten way too much. I crave this stuff!” Does this sound familiar? We’ve all succumbed to a late night snack of ice cream or cookies, chips, or other treats. It’s rare that we would be watching a movie on a weekend evening and want to raid the kitchen for broccoli or some of the leftover grilled zucchini from the barbecue! I must admit, that I have ended up eating these healthier alternatives when a craving has hit me, knowing that the baked goods and fat laden foods are not in my best interest, but what drives us toward those foods in the first place?

More than just a lack of willpower or a fetish for fine, rich foods, cravings have a physiological component that must be understood in order to develop strategies for minimizing them! Fat-laden foods, those with a lot of sugar and carbohydrates, and animal products that are more calorically dense like cheese and meats are distinctly unique in that when eaten they stimulate the brain in a manner that is not too far from the resulting chemical changes that happen when an addict uses his drug of choice. Even though you may be overweight, lethargic, sick and tired of the behaviors you’ve come to think as your very bad habits, and wishing you could get your diabetes under control, eating these foods can make it difficult to break away and make changes.

Tell me how you feel when you eat chocolate or other baked goods. What is it like when you taste that creamy, rich dessert? You are comforted aren’t you? You feel at ease and more relaxed, satiated? Drugs like morphine, heroine, and other painkillers have the same effect. They stimulate the reward center in your brain. Sugar and dairy products prompt the same brain response. The part of your brain that is aroused by these foods is the same area that is triggered by love, friendship, and rewarding experiences!

Naloxone, a drug that blocks the effects of opiates in the brain, has been studied quite extensively and in recent studies has shown to decrease binge eating behavior among subjects. Some individuals may be more susceptible to rich, fattening, sugary foods as a result of a low level of dopamine in their systems, which is a chemical that elicits feelings of pleasure and well-being. Those who are depressed for example, may struggle more with cravings due to lower levels of this chemical, as well as serotonin. Serotonin serves as a mood booster and when it’s in short supply, cravings for refined carbohydrates can be intense and very difficult to avoid. An individual suffering from depression or suppressed hormones which regular mood, may eat to feel better and modulate their hormones in a manner that an otherwise average person would experience naturally. Like an addict might use or an alcoholic might drink to feel better, the person attacked with intense cravings eats to bring their hormones into better balance. Despite the attachment to physiology, however, cravings can be minimized and steps can be taken to

maintain effective control. Dieters pay attention. This information is crucial to your long-term success!

The Diet Doc Metabolic Transformation program is based on individual physiology and the effects of food in your body. The program teaches you how carbohydrates are used and the impact they have on fat burning, how various foods affect your blood sugar and blood sugar's influence on energy and feelings of satisfaction, how timing and combining your foods in different ways can lead to longer, more sustained vitality throughout the day versus severe swings in energy, as well as what is in your foods that affect your health. Education is the name of the game, and with knowledge comes the ability to manipulate your own nutrition for a lifetime of leanness and tools for kicking cravings to the curb. We explain during our initial consultation the importance of those first few days when you start the program.

Just like during this time your body is consuming less carbohydrates (not low to no carbohydrates) and using stored carbs which will in effect get it closer to burning fat for energy, kicking a bad habit takes about three weeks. During the start of your new nutrition program, this is the perfect time to get the foods that you are typically haunted by—chips, candy, cookies, cake—out of the house. Setting yourself up for success from the beginning is crucial to your commitment and sustained motivation. Three weeks is not long. Look at this time within the bigger picture of your life.

Along with removing your trigger foods, there are other tactical maneuvers you can employ to make the transition easier and cravings that much more manageable.

1. Eat a balanced breakfast. Two things are important here- breakfast and balanced. Your body is in a fasted state while you are sleeping. In order to set yourself up for having good energy throughout the day, stable blood sugar, low to no cravings, increased craving tolerance, and the ability to make wise food choices, you must eat breakfast. Secondly, your breakfast must be balanced with both lean protein and complex, slower digesting carbohydrates. A bowl of Lucky Charms just won't cut it if you're planning on eating in another three hours. Have some oatmeal with an egg white omelet for more sustained energy and a greater sense of satiety!
2. Drink your water. Oftentimes dehydration can be mistaken for hunger. If you are not hydrating your body appropriately, you risk reaching for the chocolate that's on your co-worker's desk. Carry a water bottle with you and continuously refill it throughout the day. Commit to drinking a certain number or even set a goal of having 1 bottle with every meal or snack and another in between meals.
3. Stay ahead of your hunger. Do not let too much time pass between meals. If your blood sugar falls too low, you risk making poor choices when you finally do get to food. Ever felt like you just want to gnaw your arm off? Eating every 2-4 hours will help you to avoid reaching for snacky foods that will only give you quick energy and then send you into a cycle of blood sugar highs and lows.

4. Pre-plan your day with meals that will sustain you. Ask yourself when preparing what your lean protein source will be, then your complex carbohydrate source.
5. Exercise. Not only do you need exercise for health reasons, but it too changes your brain chemistry and enhances those feel-good hormones. Exercise and activity can be used as alternative to snacking as well. When a craving hits, use movement instead of food to feel better!
6. Sleep. Amazing how so many of our choices can impact our body's chemistry. Sleep too can change our hormones. Lack of it influences the hormones that affect our appetite! When we're tired we are at greater risk of craving refined carbs. Get your Z's!
7. Ask yourself when the cravings typically hit. Are they worst at a certain time of day? Do you find that a certain environment poses the most problems? Is there a certain person who influences your eating habits negatively? Take some time to analyze what you've experienced in the past and start developing a relapse prevention plan using the tips above.

You do not have to be under the thumb of your cravings. Make the decision now to take them by the hand and show them who is boss. And if you need help, The Diet Doc has an on-staff counselor who deals with just this sort of thing to bring you back to the health you crave!