

## Q. How can I better manage food cravings?

A. It's 3 p.m. You're tired and stressed. And you can't stop thinking about candy bars and cookies.

Or maybe it's a soda, burger, and fries. That ever happen?

You know these foods aren't exactly healthy. But you still crave them.

Dr. Douglas Lisle, author of *The Pleasure Trap*, puts it this way. "You know what you should do, so why is it so hard to do it?"<sup>1</sup> Understanding where food cravings come from can help.

### Two types of food cravings

Food cravings occur for two main reasons. Physiological (body) needs or psychological (mind) needs. Sometimes it's both.

#### 1. Physiological cravings

If you're craving "pleasure" foods (ice cream, cookies, treats, refined grains), your blood sugar level is probably too low.

- Skipping meals or eating this kind of food often will cause rapid changes in blood sugar levels from too much insulin. And you'll experience food cravings.

If a poor diet really is to blame, change your menu.

- Eat more healthy proteins and healthy fats.
- Eat an apple, orange, nuts, or dried apricots to satisfy cravings, instead of unhealthy foods.



#### 2. Psychological cravings

These types of cravings typically stem from learned behavior.

- What's your relationship to food?
- Do you turn to food for comfort?
- Is your craving linked to feeling happy, sad, lonely, bored, or stressed?

Food cravings are often tied to how you're feeling.

Fortunately, you can do something about this type of food craving, too.

#### 3 steps to manage food cravings

Think of food cravings like any other addiction (smoking, alcohol, drugs). When a craving strikes, take these three steps to change your behavior.

##### Step 1: Stop.

Before you open the refrigerator, walk into the store, or pull into the drive-thru to get your fix, stop. Take a minute to notice that you're having a food craving.

Research shows that distracting yourself for 30 seconds can be enough to curb a food craving.<sup>2</sup>

##### Step 2: Think.

Think about what's happening. Are you actually hungry?

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Stop to think about it before you start eating. This will help you take the next step to deal with a craving.

##### Step 3: Choose.

It's decision time. If you really want to control food cravings, you need to create habits to help you deal with them.

- Start by making small changes.
- Swap an unhealthy comfort food for something better, like apple slices instead of cookies.
- Limit emotional eating.
- Try it for a day, then a week, and keep going.

When you give into food cravings, it might make you feel good. But it also makes your body and your brain crave those foods even more. The only way you can escape this pleasure trap is by changing your behaviors.

You'll still get food cravings. But if you stop, think, and choose, you'll be able to give that candy bar or soda a nod and move on.

#### References

1. Lisle, D. *The Pleasure Trap: Mastering the Hidden Force that Undermines Health & Happiness*, India, MA: Healthy Living Publications.
2. Weil, R., et al. Effects of simple distraction tasks on self-induced food cravings in men and women with grade 3 obesity, Obesity Society. From: <https://tinyurl.com/wbosmcl>