

How to Curb Your Sugar Cravings

If you feel an overpowering draw toward sugary foods and carbohydrates, you're certainly not alone. But before you write it off as having poor willpower or self-control, you should know that in most cases, these cravings are the biological result of hormonal imbalances and natural (but harmful) cycles that perpetuate themselves. Often, situations going on in our lives might initiate or worsen the cravings – a stressful relationship, a stressful job, depression, lack of proper exercise and sleep, or even participation in a lot of the fad dieting that moves in and out of popularity. Below, you will find more detail about how these cravings result from specific circumstances in your life and in your hormone levels. It is important that you realize that these cravings are not some proof that you lack the willpower you need to have over your eating habits; rather, they are like a cycle that needs to be stopped. The sooner, the better!

Emotions

Sugar cravings work in much the same way as other cravings, such as cravings for alcohol. Your body actually develops a dependency, and breaking this takes concerted effort and support from others. Also, and in much the same way as cravings for alcohol, sugar cravings can be tied into your emotional well being. We've all heard of emotional eating: this is when you turn to food as comfort, and nine times out of ten, that food you turn to will be high in sugar. Put simply: the more your emotions push you toward sugary foods in order to find some respite, the more your body needs these foods to maintain feelings of happiness.

Understanding the role your emotions play in the cycle of craving sugary foods and carbohydrates is important. If you see that these cravings are out of your hands – that they are a direct result of your mind's attempt to deal with stressful and painful situations in your life – you will begin to realize what you can do to stop it from happening.

Serotonin Levels and Depression

Your emotions are a trigger for your sugar cravings, and the hormone that regulates those emotions is serotonin. Serotonin is a chemical in your brain that affects your mood. It is a hormone that regulates feelings of happiness – a large amount can create feelings of extreme euphoria while low levels can cause depression. Multiple factors can change your serotonin, including your body's digestion process or hormone fluctuations. Sugary foods add a quick boost of serotonin to your brain, which is why many people view them as comfort foods. They quite literally comfort your mood and make you feel happier. However, the serotonin boost is short-lived, and your body will eventually crash back to its former serotonin levels. The effect is similar to drinking caffeine or taking energy pills – after a brief period of elevated

mood and energy, you experience a crash. Continuing this cycle worsens the original problem because it's only a quick fix.

Insulin Resistance and Glucose Absorption

Ever tried a low-fat diet? If so, then you've probably created an even bigger problem for yourself regarding food cravings, especially cravings for sugars and carbohydrates. Insulin resistance is a steadily growing problem facing many people that results in the body's inability to get needed glucose to the cells. Since insulin serves as a mechanism that moves the sugar from your blood to your cells, if it spikes too often (which can be a consequence of eating a lot of carbohydrates and sugar), your body reacts by decreasing the insulin receptors on the surface of its cells. This is another cycle that perpetuates itself, leaving you with irresistible cravings that can only be satisfied by more and more sugar.

Other Hormonal Factors

Yuzo Ninomiya, a neuroscientist at Kyushu University in Japan, conducted a study in which leptin, a hormone that regulates appetite, was used. He and his colleagues found that when leptin levels were low, a person's sensitivity to sugar was high. In addition, they found that leptin levels tend to fluctuate throughout the course of the day – usually increasing as the day progresses. This is one of the primary reasons why sugary foods “taste better” in the morning, and why the body seems to crave high-sugar content most during the early part of the day. It also offers yet another connection between the growing body of research relating to hormonal factors and having a “sweet-tooth”.

So How Does All This Help Me?

You're probably wondering...*ok, so if all these factors are working against me, how am I ever going to curb my sugar cravings?* Knowing that everything from your mood to your hormones might be working against you, the battle seems to be all an uphill one, doesn't it?

But the good news is that there IS a way to do it, and it's a lot simpler than you may think. It begins with a new outlook – one that forces you to stop blaming yourself or considering yourself “weak” for giving in. The simple truth is, you're not weak – you're only in the middle of a negative cycle that keeps perpetuating itself, making it harder and harder for you to find a way out. Once you break that cycle, you'll find that it's a lot easier than you think to finally gain the upper hand against sugar cravings controlling your life and controlling your weight.

Here are the steps you need to take to make this happen:

1. Stop blaming yourself. It's not a lack of willpower that is keeping you from curbing your sugar cravings, it's hormone levels, emotions, and stress that's doing it. Blaming yourself only worsens these conditions – it puts you in a bad mood (thereby decreasing your serotonin levels), it makes you feel emotionally fragile (which makes you want to eat more

sugar just to bring your mood “up”), and it adds stress to your life by way of feeling like a failure.

2. Eat better. What I mean by this is that you need to make sure that your body is getting adequate nutrition. While this might seem like a given, it will not only help you to lose the weight that is a product of your sugar cravings, it will also help your hormone levels and your body’s insulin absorption rate. The healthier your diet is, the less sugar you will crave.
3. Talk to your doctor about supplements to get you back on track. These can be in the form of pharmaceutical-grade supplements or vitamins, or hormone replacement therapy to regulate and restore your body’s natural hormonal balance.

The fact is, these steps will not only curb your sugar cravings – they will replace them with cravings for healthier foods. Once you can stop the negative cycle, a new, more positive one, can replace it.

And you won’t even need willpower to make it happen!