

Food Cravings Guide

Food cravings are something that most people experience in their lives at one point or another, if not daily. They can range from cravings of sugary, sweet candy to salty French fries.

Most people attribute these cravings to poor self-control or to simply craving the foods they've cut out while trying to diet. This is not necessarily the case.

The human body is very complex with an intricate system of balances and signals that help it function properly. Food cravings are just another way for the body to signal what it needs, giving us the chance to fulfill that need.

Food cravings are caused by certain foods, lack of certain nutrients, hormonal imbalances, and lifestyle behaviors. What we need to determine is what our body is really asking for, then provide it with what it needs.

Common Causes of Cravings:

1. **Water** – very often when people feel hungry, they are really just thirsty. Being dehydrated can confuse our senses, causing us to think we're hungry when we're not. When experiencing cravings, drink a large glass of water first before reaching for a snack. Often, this will curb the feeling of hunger and save us from eating unnecessary food that the body doesn't need.
2. **Seasonal** – people often crave foods that coincide with the current season. Temperature may play a role here: it's common to crave warming foods in the winter (soups, meat, oil) and cooling foods (fruit, raw food, ice cream) in the summer, which is no coincidence. Fall is a time people crave "grounding" foods (squash, onions, nuts) and Spring is a time for detoxification (fruits and vegetables).

Another season of cravings can come with the Holidays. People get used to having certain foods around certain times of the year (e.g. Thanksgiving) and may crave turkey or cranberry sauce, or whatever they are used to eating during those times.

3. **Life Deficiencies** – having a physical, emotional and spiritual practice in our lives is just as important as the food we eat. This consists of having satisfaction in key areas, such as: career, relationships, finances, fitness, sleep, recreation, etc. If we are unhappy in any of these areas or feel stressed out, we may start to crave certain foods to keep us fulfilled emotionally.

4. **Yin/yang imbalance** – all foods are considered to have either expansive qualities (yin) or contractive qualities (yang). Everything in life has a balance and our bodies are no different. Often, when we eat foods that are one extreme of yin (e.g. sweet food), we will crave foods at the other extreme of yang (salty food) to balance us out.
5. **Mineral deficiencies** – the body will crave certain foods that contain the minerals it lacks. Below is a chart of specific mineral deficiencies, the associated cravings and healthy foods that can be eaten to satisfy the craving.
6. **Hormonal imbalance**– cravings can occur during certain times for women such as menstruation, pregnancy, or menopause. This is due to certain fluctuations in the estrogen and testosterone hormones.

How to Deal with Cravings

1. Drink sufficient amounts of water throughout the day to ensure enough fluids are taken in.
2. Choose healthier alternatives (refer to chart below).
3. Take a walk, bubble bath, or phone a friend – if the craving is purely emotional or from boredom or stress, try to get your mind off of the craving and do something else to give your body what it needs.

Craving	Reason (Deficiency)	Solution
Salt/Salty Foods	Chloride	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish • Raw goat cheese • Sea salt
	Zinc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea salt
	Adrenal Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a complex issue but stress reduction, hormonal/ adrenal support and a clean diet are key.
Sugar	Candida (yeast overgrowth in gut)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candida diet • Probiotics
	Chromium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broccoli • Grapes • Cheese

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dried beans • Calf liver • Chicken
	Sulfur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cranberries • Horseradish • Cruciferous vegetables • Kale • Cabbage
	Carbon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh Fruits (e.g. strawberries, bananas, apples)
	Tryptophan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beef • Cheese • Dairy • Liver • Lamb • Raisins • Sweet potato • Spinach • Turkey
	Phosphorus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dairy • Meat
	Low blood sugar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proteins • Fats (good quality fats)
Simple carbohydrates (like pasta, bread, starchy food)	Sugar addiction Low carbohydrate levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have meals high in protein, healthy fat and complex carbs. • Low GI foods • Don't go more than 5 hours without eating so blood sugar doesn't drop too low • Exercise – it produces serotonin which elevates mood and decreases cravings • Eating foods high in tryptophan (precursor to serotonin) also helps (see foods containing tryptophan above) • Avoid artificial sweeteners
	Feeling deprived of emotional needs (affection, love, etc.) Tension or stress	Refer to “Life Deficiencies” above
Chocolate	Magnesium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legumes • Raw nuts and seeds • High-cocoa dark chocolate

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leafy greens • Whole grains
Coffee or tea (caffeine)	Adrenal Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole food diet • Vit C support • Adrenal recovery protocol of de-stressing, herbal/hormonal support
	Stress and habit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch to herbal teas • Green tea (lower caffeine)
	Iron Vitamin C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apricots • Black cherries • Broccoli, raw • Figs • Fish • Greens • Meat • Poultry • Seaweed
	NaCl (salt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apple cider vinegar (on salad) • Sea salt
	Phosphorous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beef • Chicken • Dairy • Eggs • Fish • Legumes • Liver • Nuts • Poultry
	Sulfur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cruciferous vegetables • Egg yolks • Garlic • Muscle protein • Onion • Red peppers
Meat	Protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat • Legumes • Nuts
	Carnitine Iron Minerals Vitamin B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat
Dairy	Stress, loneliness, a need for an emotional connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpasteurized, raw dairy if tolerated (amino acids in milk)

		<p>act like opiates to relax us)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nut or coconut-based products • Creamy food like guacamole, hummus, etc.
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Which cravings to give in to?

It's important to differentiate between the foods we really need to feel well and cravings that will drag us down. Here is a simple rule:

Cravings to resist: sugar, processed dairy, processed foods and starches (unless you've been on a grain-free diet and you feel like your body calls for grains in a "healthy" way).

Cravings to give in to: fats (good quality fats only), meat, oils, fresh/raw/cooked vegetables, whole foods, salty foods containing sea salt, good quality dairy (if tolerated).

Sources:

1. <http://www.naturopathyworks.com/pages/cravings.php>
2. Integrative Nutrition 2008 (The 8 Causes of Cravings)

Disclaimer

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