

## **Taking a Bite Out of Cravings**

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### **Question: Why do I have sugar and salt cravings and my husband does not?**

First of all, a craving can be defined as when only one food, or one type of food, will satisfy you. When we have these cravings, we are often willing to go out in a storm to fulfill them.

Women crave foods more often than men do. We know that almost all women (97 %) and most men (68%), find it hard to “just say no” to a sweet treat, or a carbohydrate rich snack, when offered. About 85% of all people give into these cravings, at least half of the time.

Women typically crave chocolate, cookies, cakes, rolls, crackers, and ice cream. Reasons why women crave certain foods are not clearly understood. Many researchers suspect it is due to a woman’s need for more calories during menstruation. Women burn at least 300 extra calories, per day, during menstruation.

Hormonal changes can also cause low blood sugar and increase the desire for sweet foods, such as cookies and chocolate. Carbohydrate rich foods boost energy and also calm those cravings.

Women also have a tendency to skip meals, especially breakfast, thereby failing to meet their caloric needs during the day. Due to hectic schedules, at work and/or at home, women tend not to fuel their bodies properly, which, in turn, leads to sugar cravings. These cravings tend to peak mid-afternoon, leading to overeating in the late afternoon and evening. When the body is underfed during the day, cravings can be overwhelming.

### **Why a salt craving?**

A craving for salt, in women, may be due to the effect of estrogen on the anti-diuretic hormones, which cause fluid retention. Some women gain up to 10 pounds of added water weight during menstruation. This turns into a salt craving to help maintain normal salt concentration in the body.

Salt cravings can also stem from low calcium intake. Research has reported that people with low calcium are most prone to cravings for salty foods. As well, the crunchy textures of many salted snack foods are appealing and satisfying, as they help us relieve stress and tension held in the jaw.

### **Why the sugar craving?**

A desire for sweets is hardwired into the brain. A carbohydrate rich snack stimulates the release of the hormone insulin. This reaction allows blood levels of tryptophan to rise in the brain, which is then converted into serotonin. Serotonin is a neuro-transmitter that improves mood, helps us sleep, reduces pain, and calms us down. People who crave carbohydrates may have lower serotonin levels than people who prefer protein rich snacks. A carbohydrate rich meal, or snack, alters brain chemistry and provides temporary relief from tension, stress and mild depression.

**Craving Management and Weight Control Guidelines:**

- Keep hunger in check - Eat every 2-3 hours
- Eat balanced meals. Choose foods, from each food group, at each meal
- Plan healthy snacks ahead of time
- Be active in the evening to prevent snacking

**Snack Right - for sugar cravings:**

- Sliced mango topped with vanilla yogurt, and mint
- 1 cup frozen blueberries serve with a cup of 1% milk, flavored with almond extract
- Fruit fondue 2 cups of fresh fruit, and dipped into fat free chocolate syrup
- Fig bars and 1 cup of warmed nonfat milk flavored with vanilla
- Low fat chocolate pudding with sliced pineapple

**Snack Right - for salt cravings:**

- 1 cup of pretzels and dip into salsa
- Pita chips with hummus (chickpea spread)
- A slice of turkey wrapped around a pickle
- Herb non-fat cream cheese on a rye cracker
- 3 cups of air-popped popcorn sprinkled with parmesan cheese

**One A Final Thought:**

Drink lots of water. Often a desire for sweets, or salt, is actually a signal that the body needs fluids. My rule of thumb is to fight chocolate with chocolate. Keep tempting foods out of the house, but if you need a fix, eat what you crave, instead of eating everything else, and more. And if you have a craving, try waiting it out. Wait fifteen minutes and see if the craving is still there.

Most of time, if you have been eating properly during the day, it will disappear.

Interested in learning how better nutrition can help you?

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