

## Q. What can I do to control food cravings?

**A.** It's 3 p.m. You're tired and stressed. And you can't stop thinking about steak, cheesecake, and wine. Or maybe it's a soda, burger, and fries.

You know these foods are not exactly healthy. But you still want them.

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

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.

#### • Physiological cravings

If you're not getting enough vitamins and nutrients in your diet, physiological needs may be the reason. Some foods can even create cravings.

If a poor diet really is to blame, change your menu. Try eating a plant-based diet for a week. Or at least more fruits and vegetables. You'll feel a lot better. Cravings will subside. And you'll be motivated to keep eating this way.

#### • Psychological cravings

These type 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.

### Change behavior to curb food cravings

Think of food cravings like any other addiction (smoking, alcohol, drugs). When a craving strikes, take steps to change your behavior. Here's how:

**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>

**Think.** Think about what's happening. Are you actually hungry? Stop to think about it before you start eating. This will help you take the next step to deal with a craving.

**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 cheesecake a nod and move on.

#### References

1. Lisle, D. (2006). *The Pleasure Trap: Mastering the hidden force that undermines health & happiness*. Encinitas, CA.
2. Weil, R., et al. (2014). Effects of simple distraction tasks on self-induced food cravings in men and women with grade 3 obesity. *Obesity Society*. Accessed on July 10, 2017, from <http://research.usc.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/usc:14953>.

