

WEEK TEN – CRAVING BUSTERS - HOW TO PREVENT CRAVINGS

Learning:

- What causes cravings
- How to prevent cravings
- How to sense true nutritional cravings versus wants

Making healthy decisions may seem like a much less daunting task if you learn to prevent vulnerable, unplanned moments. We have all gone too long without eating, tried the “all or nothing” approach, avoided our favourite treat or even let our emotions dictate our decisions. Cravings can set in at any moment and can often be hard to overcome; however, if you learn to identify when cravings set in and prevent these vulnerable times, you can set yourself up for success.

Can you identify times your life when you experience food cravings? What is it that you crave? Can you identify a similar cause as to why the craving might set in?

Food cravings can arise at many different times, but they are more common in certain situations. Here are some examples of why and when food cravings might set in:

1. Skipping a meal or snack: Intense hunger can lead to cravings, over-eating and making poor, unhealthy food choices.
2. Avoiding your favourite food for a period of time: Avoiding what you truly want will only make you want that food even more. Sometimes if you hold off long enough or distract yourself with a non-food related activity, you may be able to divert the craving.
3. Irregular meal pattern: The body likes consistency. When your circadian rhythm is out of whack, it may be tough to keep your body, mind and food cravings under control. Try to eat at the same time each and every day, and stock up on what the body really needs.
4. Lack of sleep: Poor sleep habits are associated with cravings and, in particular, foods for quick energy.
5. Emotions: Food can provide a pleasure sensation in the body and mind and therefore emotions can cause food cravings.
6. Keeping foods that are commonly associated with cravings: The sight or thought of specific foods can induce food cravings.
7. Denying your body the basics: Stick to your recommended food groups. Cutting out food groups or not getting enough of a food group can lead to cravings almost immediately.
8. Nutritional deficiency: Listen to your body. Sometimes you are craving foods because your body truly is deficient in a nutrient. Make sure you are getting the healthy foods your body needs and identify the habit if you are not. Learn to make healthy changes before a deficiency sets in.

9. Thirsty: Thirst can often be mistaken for hunger.

10. Restrictive “all or nothing” mindset: Telling yourself you want something but are not allowed to have it, can make you want it even more!

Cravings are a natural response of our body and mind telling us what they want. Depriving a craving can lead to a more intense craving later on. It is important to deal with a craving right when it sets in and to identify the cue as to why it might be happening. Here are some helpful tips you can use to prevent cravings and deal with a craving.

Load up on fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are loaded with vitamins, minerals and fibre and most are 99% water. Consuming the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables will help you achieve your vitamin and mineral needs. Vitamin and mineral deficiencies can often lead to cravings. The fibre and water will also help keep you fuller for longer and provide a sustained, gradual energy to help delay your hunger response until the next meal or snack. Be proactive and load up on the good stuff. Your body and mind will not even have time to crave the unhealthy options!

Hydration

Be sure to keep hydrated by drinking at least eight glasses of water throughout the day. Thirst can often be mistaken for hunger pangs. At the first signs of hunger or cravings in between meal and snack time, try drinking a large glass of water and evaluating your craving after.

Distract yourself first with non-food related behaviour

Do you know how to identify true hunger? True hunger is identified by stomach pains and growling. Ask yourself, at this moment could I eat a cup of broccoli and an apple to satisfy my hunger? If the answer is yes, you are truly hungry. If the answer is no, I would rather eat the chocolate bar, you are probably experiencing a food craving. The more we focus on the craving that has come into our mind, the harder it will be to overcome the craving. Try going for a walk, listening to music, talking to a friend, getting some fresh air or simply engaging in being physical active for a minimum of 10–15 minutes. If after you are done you still experience the craving, occasionally indulge guilt-free.

Get six to nine hours of sleep per night and reduce stress

Poor sleep habits or not enough sleep can be directly linked with food cravings, especially with quick energy in the form of sugary foods. Take control in preventing these cravings by keeping a regular sleep-wake schedule and by getting six to nine hours of sleep per night. Sleep is like a bank; if you don't get enough one night, you can always get more the next night! Sleep can help you to better manage your stress as well. Stress can also cause food cravings. Manage your stress by engaging in breathing, meditation, walking, talking to friends and loved ones, proper nutrition and hydration.

Identify emotions and HALT

Emotions can trigger intense food cravings, and food often provides a feeling of pleasure to the body and mind. Identifying your emotional state can help identify when a craving might not be food related. Hunger, anger, loneliness and thirst (HALT) are a few of the more common ones. Sadness, stress, tiredness, frustration and many more emotions can lead to food cravings. Identify your emotion and attempt to deal with the problem to address the emotion rather than covering up your feelings with food.

Keep food associated with cravings out of sight, out of mind and out of the house

If you know you like to over indulge in chocolate, chips, crackers, popcorn, desserts or cheeses, keep foods out of sight, out of mind and help to prevent cravings! Candies or small chocolates set around the house can also induce cravings whether you truly want them or not. Keep all foods off the kitchen counter in cabinets. Do not buy foods or keep foods in the house that you lack control of eating. If a craving sets in, you are less likely to drive to the store to get the food; however, if the food is in the house, it is much easier to give in more often.

Occasionally indulge guilt-free

There is nothing wrong with occasionally indulging in a treat. Often times a small amount of a treat will take care of the craving right away. If you deprive yourself of your favourite foods or the foods you crave, you are more likely to binge or experience more intense cravings. Practice the 80/20 rule. Understand that the 20% indulging will help to keep you on track in the long run.

Identify your craving: Sweet, salty, bitter, savory, crunchy, creamy or high fat

Identifying your craving can help you to better “indulge” and take care of the craving right when it sets in. The common flavour cravings are sweet, salty, bitter or savory. You may also experience a craving for a specific texture such as crunchy or creamy; or you may simply crave quick energy in the form of sugar or additional calories in the form of high fat foods. Whatever the craving, identify exactly what it is you are craving and allow yourself to indulge in a small amount to curb the craving directly.

Self-exploration and behaviour exploration

Can you identify times in your life when you experienced cravings? What might have caused the craving? Look at your food diary and identify situations that might lead to cravings. How might you prevent these cravings from happening?

For each area you identify that might lead to cravings, write:

Two possible ways of preventing the craving

Two possible solutions for dealing with the craving when it sets in

What is the most common situation you find yourself in that causes cravings?

Goal setting: Set SMART goals to work on for the next week

A key point to any successful plan is to complete and review your goals on an ongoing basis. Complete the following goals sheet based on the information this chapter covered. Put pen to paper to determine what changes you need to make to ensure that you have adequate nutrients from all food groups to create a healthy diet. Focus on what you believe you need to change to improve things in this area. Identify your needs, obstacles, challenges and back- up plan to create long-term positive change.

Write a SMART goal to address the most common type of situation that causes food cravings.

What actions might you take this week to prevent cravings?

Write down at least three things you can do to be proactive and set yourself up for success.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Keep a food diary for at least three days this week. Identify and circle times where you were experiencing a craving. Think about the goal you set for yourself. Evaluate your success in dealing with the craving, if you had one.

What might be one long-term solution to address food cravings to help you continue to work toward your long-term goal?
