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How to stop your sugar cravings

Many of us fancy something sweet from time-to-time and often raid the cupboard for biscuits or chocolate after dinner. However, it's easy to get into the habit of eating too many sugary foods - which is harmful for our health. So can we curb our cravings?

Why do we crave sugar?

Sugar cravings are normal and can be both biological and psychological, says Reema Patel, a London-based dietitian at [Dietitian Fit & Co.](#)

"It comes from when there was a time when food was scarce, and we as humans had to eat a lot of high calorie foods for our survival," she explains.

Sugary foods also affect the brain's reward system, triggering the release of feel good chemicals such as endorphins and serotonin. These boost our **mood**, leaving us wanting to go back for more. In other words, eating sugar kickstarts a chemical reaction that can create a cycle of addiction¹.

Studies have also found **stress** and **lack of sleep** may be linked to sugar cravings. When we eat sugar, hormones are released to reduce the feelings of **stress**. In turn, this increases our desire for **comfort foods**, creating a cycle of emotional eating habits².

Another study suggested that people who don't get enough sleep tend to crave foods that are sweet, salty and starchy³. This may be because these **foods** make us feel good. Poor sleep has also been linked to the appetite-regulating hormone ghrelin, which makes us feel hungry⁴.

Can a vitamin deficiency cause sugar cravings?

"If you lack certain nutrients that help provide [energy](#) to the body, this can make us tired," says Patel. "In turn, this can make us crave sweet foods which provide an energy boost. This may include deficiencies in magnesium, B vitamins and zinc."

How to stop sugar cravings

Craving sugar is normal and you shouldn't feel guilty about having [chocolate](#) now and again. However, eating too much can lead to [weight gain](#), [type 2 diabetes](#), [tooth decay](#) and can increase your risk of several serious medical conditions. A diet rich in sugary foods and beverages can lead to [obesity](#), which raises your risk of [cancer](#) and [heart disease](#).

Cutting down on your sugar intake isn't easy, but there are steps you can take to make the process easier.

Think about why you're craving sugar

It's important to stop and think about why you're craving sugar. "consider if you are physically hungry, or is there something else going on here? Are you looking to satisfy an emotion you're feeling, and perhaps using sugar to do so? Looking to meet that emotion in other ways is important," Patel asks.

"For example, if you notice you feel very stressed and are craving sugar, could you try other [stress management](#) techniques such as [exercise](#), [meditation](#), or journaling?"

Distract yourself

Try doing something to take your mind off the craving and allow it to pass. "Remember, it is OK to have sugar, but it's important to not let it be the main go-to when you need to meet your emotions in other ways that can help in the long term," says Patel.

[Exercise](#) releases endorphins - feel-good hormones - that can boost your mood and reduce stress.

Try food swaps

It's important not to completely restrict yourself when it comes to sweet foods as you'll end up craving it even more. Sometimes, it can help to swap sweets or [chocolate](#) for healthier alternatives such as fruit. However, be mindful that some seemingly healthy foods such as yoghurts can contain sugar. Patel also suggests eating a small amount of what you fancy.

"Take a small portion in a bowl and be sure to eat this slowly and [mindfully](#), allowing you to fully concentrate on the taste, flavours and sensations," she advises. "This can help you feel satisfied with the smaller amount and stop the cravings."

Focus on your diet

Eating a healthy and balanced [diet](#) overall can help reduce sugar cravings. "Make sure you are having filling [meals](#) throughout the day with enough [protein](#), wholegrains and healthy fats and make sure you're not waiting too long between meals," says Patel.

"This will help to prevent your energy and [blood sugar](#) from dipping. When this happens, it's very easy to go for something high in sugar to make us feel better."

Further reading

1. Avena et al: [Evidence for sugar addiction: Behavioural and neurochemical effects of intermittent, excessive sugar intake.](#)
2. Jacques et al: [The impact of sugar consumption on stress driven, emotional and addictive behaviours.](#)
3. Greer et al: [The impact of sleep deprivation on food desire in the human brain.](#)
4. Lin et al: [Associations of short sleep duration with appetite-regulating hormones and adipokines: A systematic review and meta-analysis.](#)

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