

All About Food Cravings

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Do you often long for salty potato chips or sweet chocolate? People tend to crave non-nutritious foods that are high in salt, sugar or fat (or a combination).

Can cravings be explained? Some researchers have hypothesized that we want foods that contain nutrients our body lacks, but science has not fully supported this. Instead, cravings are likely the result of a blend of factors including:

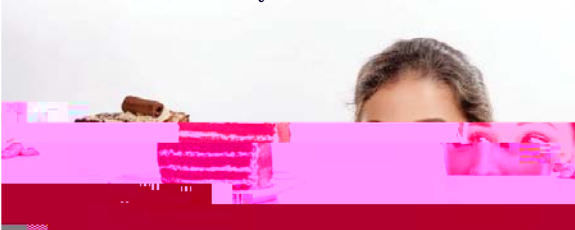
- High stress.
- Lack of sleep, which can affect hormone levels.
- Forbidding oneself from eating certain foods.
- Associations (such as craving popcorn during a movie).
- Hormonal changes.
- Emotions — such as sadness, which may lead to emotional eating.
- Thirst or dehydration.



To combat cravings, start by eating meals that contain enough protein to make you feel full. Studies show that adequate protein (about 20 to 30 grams per meal) can decrease cravings by up to 60%. Also make sure to stay well hydrated by drinking water all day long.

If cravings pop up when you're sleep deprived or stressed, try incorporating better lifestyle habits, such as turning off devices an hour before bedtime.

Deprivation doesn't work for many people, who prefer to enjoy a small portion of what they crave. Does this sound like you? If so, enjoy your favorite food mindfully. That means you eat a reasonable portion to satisfy the craving, and savor every delicious bite with all of your senses.



Get in the Swim

Water exercise offers special rewards. First, no matter what the activity involves, doing it in chest-deep water takes added effort. And low-impact aqua workouts can leave you feeling calm and invigorated, not tired or achy.

Fitness benefits? Even the simplest pool exercise — walking forward and backward in waist-high water — can improve balance and flexibility and train your core muscles, all with help from the water's resistance. Aqua aerobic routines will help you reduce body fat, lose weight and strengthen your cardiovascular health.

Pool classes offer a variety of exercise options. In addition to lap swimming, you can switch to shallow or deep-water activities that provide vigorous muscle workouts, especially by keeping your full range of motion under water.

Just starting or have limited mobility? Choose an introductory class and work with the instructor to identify your fitness goals and to learn proper form. If you don't swim well, find a class that offers routines in the shallow end of the pool, such as water walking. As your strength grows, you can increase your pace for enhanced fitness.

Check with your health care provider first if you have chronic health problems (e.g., heart issues, arthritis, backache, injury and obesity), you're pregnant or rehabilitating from an injury.





The [Smart Moves Toolkit](#), including this issue's printable download, [The Heat is On](#), is at personalbest.com/extras/19V6tools.