



## **Five Causes of Sugar/Food Cravings & Holiday Choices**

By Sarah Philipp, Certified Holistic Nutritionist

Too often, we see cravings as habits - or little more than evidence of no willpower. Either way, we deem them as "naughty" or "bad behavior". They can actually be messages from our bodies warning us of deficiencies or imbalances that are both physical and emotional at the root. While there are more cravings than one can count, here are 5 major causes of sugar and food cravings that we experience in everyday life.

### **1.) Dehydration**

The first of these deficiencies is water. It can be hard to find the time to fit in a glass of water between the coffee, cocktails, and eggnog that creep their way into the Holidays. Our schedules may become so heavy with parties, errands, etc., that we may be unconscious of the fact that we're drinking more coffee than usual. Not to mention, a warm latte is very enticing in 30 degree winter weather. This is all a perfect storm for dehydration. When we are dehydrated, we are more likely to crave sweets and salty foods.

### **2.) Protein Deficiency**

A diet lacking in sufficient protein can also lead to sugar and carbohydrate cravings. This is caused by unstable blood sugar. Make sure you are getting the necessary amount of protein; about 1/4 of your plate is considered optimal. For the record, this does not just mean meat. Explore the many different and delicious plant-based protein sources if you have not already.

### **3.) Yeast Overgrowth**

Sometimes it isn't even you craving the sweets, but the fungus inside of you! From birth, we have fungus and yeast living in our intestines. Ideally, these critters live within their boundaries and are kept from overgrowth. Although, when they are "over fed" with sugar and starchy carbohydrates, we lose this harmony, and the yeast can become overgrown within us. This can lead to them craving even more of their food sources as they proliferate. While completely denying sugar and starchy carbohydrates is not the ultimate end goal, make sure to try and keep a healthy harmony with the yeast inside your body by low to moderate starch and sugar consumption. Your body will reward you with fewer cravings and other symptoms.

### **4.) Addiction and Allergies**

Can you really be addicted to food? Absolutely! To make matters worse, many times, we are actually allergic to the same foods to which we have developed an addiction. This is because the proteins in these allergic foods have can stimulate a flood of opiates in our brain giving us a sense of pleasure on the same scale of drugs such as cocaine and heroin. The three biggest culprits when it comes to food allergy addictions are wheat, dairy, and sugar. We can consider these foods to be addictive because they not only perpetuate their own consumption, but abstaining from them can cause a withdrawal state. This withdrawal results in craving more of the substance, overeating, weight gain, and mood swings. As with yeast the goal here is harmony and I suggest a method such as '80/20' -- 80% of your food intake should be healthy, nutrient dense food while 20% may be used for food choices that are less nutrient dense.

## 5.) Stress

It's very important to gain the awareness needed to make the distinction between an emotional craving and a physical one. Much of the time it is emotional hunger that drives us toward certain foods - usually those high in fat and sugar. If this is the case, exploring stress relieving techniques as well as slowing down can be useful in getting the upper hand with the cravings. Stress is something we all experience in our day to day lives and it undoubtedly plays a huge role in our diet choices. Make sure you stay aware of your stress levels and take an active step in keeping up with lifestyle decisions that limit stress so it doesn't cause you to make meal choices you will regret later.

### What to do:

1. Plan ahead: Never go to a party hungry. Make sure you fill up on nutrient dense and minimally processed foods before leaving the house.
2. Eat something sour: This taste leaves sugar cravings dead in their tracks. Try sauerkraut, kimchi, and other fermented vegetables.
3. Move more: Exercise has been proven to improve the efficacy with which we digest and metabolize sugar.
4. Slow down, and breathe: Remove yourself from the area or situation that is triggering your cravings. Maybe don't stand directly next to the dessert table ;).

All in all, cravings are a constant battle for everyone. Progress is not made by their absence, but by the increased consciousness and control one has of them. These 5 causes are only a few amongst many that strongly affect our desires to eat certain foods or choose other drinks besides water. By beginning your focus on these 5 causes, you will find it easier to control many cravings and stick to whatever meal plan you put your mind to.

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