6 Ways to Fight Your Sweet and Salty Cravings
How to prevent bingeing on sweets and salty snacks

Are you forever trying to give up sweets or salty snacks? If you think cravings are the reason the number on your scale won’t budge, take heart.

It is possible to lose your cravings. If you’re like most people, you’re just not going about it the right way. These tips for success from our dietitians should help:

1. Keep your body well-fueled all day
Forget about dieting. “Focus on building healthy, portion-controlled meals from foods bursting with nutrients, then taper your calories throughout the day,” advises Anna Taylor, MS, RD, LD. “And never, ever skip meals.”

Eating regularly throughout the day helps control cravings. “Keep meal and snack times consistent,” advises Kate Patton, MEd, RD, CSSD, LD. “Eat breakfast within one or two hours of waking up, and allow no more than four to six hours between meals.”

Adds Jennifer Willoughby, RD, CSP, LD, “Include a protein source in every meal and snack. This helps aid satiety to curb your cravings.”

Crave something sweet or salty? Choose foods with nutritional value: whole grain crackers, nuts, fresh fruit, plain yogurt topped with fruit, dark chocolate that’s over 70 percent cacao.

And be prepared:

- Stash healthy snacks in your purse, desk or messenger bag.
- Plan dinners ahead of time so your mind, and not your stomach, decides the menu.

Finally, avoid being too restrictive. “Enjoying appropriate portions of sweet treats from time to time can help keep you on track,” says Ms. Willoughby.

2. Don’t rely on diet soda
Are you trying to satisfy your sweet tooth with diet soda? Drinking artificially sweetened beverages has no effect on weight, studies show. If anything, diet beverages are more likely to expand your waistline.

“Artificial sweeteners tend to make us overeat,” explains Kristin Kirkpatrick, MS, RD, LD. “Eventually, they encourage many of us to turn to the real thing: sugar.”

Some animal studies also suggest that artificial sweeteners make our bodies resist insulin. This may increase the likelihood that we’ll develop prediabetes or diabetes, and could increase the risk of heart disease.

Want to quench your thirst? “Try seltzer water with natural flavoring or add lemon, cucumber or berries to your water,” she advises.

3. Reprogram your taste buds
How do you retrain your taste buds? “Crowd out the addictive sweet and salty foods with real foods. It’s difficult to overeat foods that come from the earth,” says Brigid Titgemeier, MS, RDN, LD.

Instead of pretzels and chips, enjoy air-popped popcorn, popcorn made with extra virgin olive oil, or unsalted mixed nuts.

Try replacing sugary treats with berries and dark chocolate (over 70 percent). Add a bit of nut butter for protein and healthy fat. “I like to snack on a piece of dark chocolate with cashew butter. The fat from the cashew butter helps turn off some of those sweet cravings,” she says.

Other options include berry herbal teas, frozen berries, and homemade nut balls sweetened with two to three medjool dates.

Adds Ms. Taylor, “With patience and practice, what used to taste sweet to you will start tasting too sweet. Juicy, fresh blueberries can be enough to satisfy a sweet tooth once you stop bombarding your taste buds with candy, sweet drinks and foods sweetened with hidden sugars.”

Similarly, after eating less salt for several weeks — by cutting down on processed foods, convenience foods, restaurant foods and the salt shaker — a little salt will start tasting like a lot of salt. And you’ll need less to satisfy your salt craving.

4. Find support for the cause
A strong support system is one of the secrets to controlling cravings. Adults often find support from fellow participants in a weight-loss program.

For kids, “parents can help by not buying sweet and salty snacks on a regular basis,” says Ms. Willoughby. “And grandparents can encourage whole, natural foods instead of desserts.”

“If children (and adults) benefit from seeing a dietitian to learn how to make appropriate yet satisfying food substitutions.”

If emotional eating is involved, a behavioral health specialist or psychologist can help develop strategies to keep weight loss on track.

5. Consider intermittent fasting
“Intermittent fasting can help with the overall reduction of hunger and cravings,” says Ms. Kirkpatrick.

You won’t starve on a fasting diet. Instead, you’ll cut back on calories, eating only 500 to 600 on fast days and the normal amount on “off days.” Over time, you’ll find yourself feeling satisfied with smaller portions.

The intermittent rhythm will also lessen your sweet and salty cravings. Best of all, “intermittent fasting has helped lots of people lose a significant amount of weight,” she says.

6. Pay attention to your body
Are you overeating because of stress? That’s often when cravings for sugar or salt surface. “Try meditation, exercise or reading to settle yourself,” says Ms. Patton.

She also recommends keeping a water bottle at your desk, in your car or in your purse to avoid dehydration.
If you have diabetes, you may crave something sweet even when your blood sugar is normal.

“Add a small amount of whip cream or dairy-free whip to berries or fruit,” advises Dawn Noe, RD, LD, CDE. “For a quick, healthy, warm dessert, mix ½ cup steel cut oats, 1 small apple, diced, and some cinnamon. Heat in the microwave for a minute or so, and you have a healthy, tasty alternative to apple crisp.”

If you have diabetes and your blood sugar is low when cravings hit, eat 15 grams of carbohydrate (three to four glucose tablets or 4 ounces of 100 percent fruit juice) to normalize it. “But avoid chocolate; it takes too long to digest and won’t raise blood sugar as quickly,” she cautions.

These tips should help you find success in controlling the cravings that lead to weight gain. They’ll also help you lower your risk for health problems like diabetes and hypertension.

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