

CONSTANT CRAVING

With all due respect to K.D. Lang, it sucks. Learn how to keep one step ahead of your appetite.

By Todd Soura

Ever found yourself rooting through the pantry or the fridge, not really sure what you're looking for, let alone how you even got there? We've all done it.

Cravings can be a healthy lifestyle killer. Think of each of those moments of weakness as undoing, one by one, all of your militant exercise sessions and the episodes of fierce discipline, like when you stared your mother-in-law dead in the eye and resisted her irresistible German chocolate cake.

A food craving is essentially a strong desire to eat even though you're not all that hungry, or even in the slightest. The reasons for them boil down to either psychological or physiological. Let's explore the former first.

A mental lapse

Most commonly, food cravings and binge eating stem from emotion, stress, boredom or even all three simultaneously. Anyone who's ever been stood up should be able to relate.

The best defense in this case is awareness and preparation. In other words, recognize the behavior and be ready for its onset. Prepare snacks and meals for the week during the weekend. And have on hand high-fiber health bars that will keep you feeling full. (Make sure they contain at least eight grams of protein and less than 250 calories.)

When you next find yourself peering into the pantry, stop and ask yourself, "Am I really hungry or just bored?" While you contemplate the answer, pour yourself a glass of water and drink it down. You should have your answer by the time you reach the bottom of the glass. Drinking plenty of water is an excellent way to combat cravings. Aim to drink daily half an ounce for every pound you weigh. (Example: 75 ounces if you weigh 150 pounds.) Hit that number and you'll find yourself feeling full far more often.

It also helps to find an outlet. Distract yourself with something other than food, like reading, writing, exercising. Hell, rearrange the living room. Just find something constructive to focus on.

If you still find yourself reaching for a fork when you probably shouldn't, keep a log of everything you're eating. It's a lot more difficult to pass it off as an unconscious act when you're faced with the reality. Also consider keeping a couple of index cards with simple, inspirational messages or your goals, like "Lose five pounds," on you at all times.

Riding the wave

When you barge into the kitchen, grab a serving spoon and start eating—in the loosest sense of the term—ice cream straight out of the carton, this is a physiological craving. Everyone's susceptible, and every once in a while is nothing to be too concerned with,



but if it's done on a more consistent basis, it's time for a change.

Physiological cravings are associated most often with diets high in carbohydrates and low in fiber, protein and healthy fat. The carbs ignite a constant fluctuation between blood sugar and insulin, and that imbalance spurs a never-ending craving for more carbs.

Carbs aren't the lone culprit, though. Serotonin, leptin, ghrelin and other hormones have all been linked to cravings, but none to as great an extent as carbs.

The solution here is relatively simple: Consume a balanced diet comprised of natural carbs (fruits, veggies, beans, nuts and brown rice), protein, healthy fat and fiber. Each meal or snack should contain meaningful quantities of at least two of the aforementioned. And don't go more than four hours without eating.

Consider the following template for an ideal day:

- 7 a.m.** Oatmeal with blueberries, an orange and a cup of coffee
- 10 a.m.** A palm-size serving of almonds and raisins (one of 10 bags made Sunday)
- 12:30 p.m.** A lettuce and spinach salad with chopped chicken breast and olive oil and vinegar dressing and a four-ounce serving of plain Greek yogurt (If you prefer fruit yogurt, buy plain and add your own.)
- 3:30 p.m.** An apple (which has about three grams of fiber, so it's okay to eat without protein or fat)
- 6:30 p.m.** Baked salmon with broccoli and a baked potato topped with plain yogurt

Whether they're reaching out from your mind or body, controlling your cravings begins with identifying the source and then preparing for it thoughtfully, not when you're scrambling in its clutches. Anticipate their arrival and you'll turn the tables quickly.

Todd Soura is the owner of the Doylestown-based Action Personal Training (215-230-8923; www.actionpersonaltraining.com).