

# How to curb cravings

## Chapter 01: An imbalance in your reward system

Understanding food cravings is the first step in curbing them. They can be influenced by many factors: it could be a hormonal imbalance or stress or emotions. Cravings are part of your brain's reward system. So, for example, dopamine is the neurotransmitter that tells you that you want something in order to feel good. So when there is any imbalance in this reward system, your body starts craving a specific kind of food, such as sweets. This can happen with alcohol as well.

## Chapter 02: Action point: Recognize the type of craving

When you have the desire for something specific it's important to recognize what

kind of craving it is. We have two different kinds of cravings. One is selective, which are cravings for specific foods. For example, if you wanted chocolate ice cream from a particular store – something very specific. This means your craving is connected to your emotions. Maybe this ice cream at this store reminds you of a person, or something like that.

The other type is called non-selective craving. This is actually just hunger. And this happens when you haven't eaten for a long time, and you think, 'OK, I'll eat whatever is in front of me'. This is biological and can sometimes be confused with thirst, due to your hypothalamus, a structure in your brain, which regulates and controls hunger and thirst. What you need to do in this instance is first drink

a glass of water, and see if the craving disappears.

Chapter 03: Action point:  
Wait 20 seconds

Do you feel a craving coming on? Stop, and wait for 20 seconds before acting on it. Breathe, distract yourself, listen to music, and ask yourself: do I really want this? And: will I regret it afterwards? If you've had a long day, you ate your meals, then you just want that little piece of chocolate – of course, go ahead. But if you crave the whole bar or a large quantity, then ask yourself: why is this happening; am I stressed, am I sad; what do I want to cover with this? During these 20 seconds, you are being mindful, and your brain can actually tell you what's going on. This can help reduce cravings.

Chapter 04: Action point:  
Stay hydrated

During your mindful 20 seconds, you may realize that you forgot to drink water with the meal you had just finished. So this may be what your body is craving. Stay

well hydrated throughout the day – aim for at least 2 liters – to reduce feeling any cravings that may be confused for something else, like a craving for sweets.

Chapter 05: Action point:  
Eat balanced meals

By making sure your meals are balanced, that is consisting of enough protein, fiber and healthy fats, you will feel full and satisfied after eating. If you have a meal, full of starch, like a plate of plain pasta without any fiber or protein, then of course you will then have cravings for something such as sweets. This is because your meal was not balanced.

Chapter 06: Action point:  
Add probiotics to your diet

In order to combat cravings, it's important to always add probiotic foods to your plate. Fermented foods, such as kimchi, kefir and yogurt, are perfect because they're full of good bacteria and help you feel more satisfied after eating. Thus reducing cravings.

## Chapter 07: Action point: Enjoy yourself

If you always like to eat dessert after a meal, then you should enjoy yourself! But limit your dessert to a small portion together with a cup of ginger or peppermint tea to aid digestion. By not forbidding yourself this pleasure, you can tell your brain that it is OK to have this small portion. And that you're allowed to enjoy it. Then you feel free. When you restrict yourself too much your body craves it more. I don't like to say there are good and bad foods. Studies have shown that it's not good to tell your brain that something is forbidden, or something is accepted – it's all food. You just need to make good choices and consider what feeds your gut, and what gives us nutrients to live and feel better. Better choices make you healthier. You will feel better when cravings disappear.