



Constant Cravings?

Does your head tell you to eat fruit while your body demands cake? Nutritionist Susannah Lawson helps you beat the urges by finding out what might cause them

■ We all have the occasional yearning – a sudden desire for chocolate when we pass a sweet shop, or for ice cream on a sunny day. There's nothing wrong with giving in occasionally, but when a craving becomes a habit, it can upset our overall health and wellbeing. So, if you feel that some unexplainable urge, rather than common sense, dictates what you eat or drink, now may be right time for you to break the habit.

Take a moment to answer the questions in the tests that follow and find out if your cravings are trying to tell you something. The tests are divided into three categories, but it is possible that you will fall into two, or even three of them. Don't worry, though, because we've got great suggestions to help you tackle those urges and take back control of what you eat and drink.

Test 1

Are you a sugar or stimulant addict?

- Do you need a tea or coffee to wake you up in the morning?
- Do you drink more than three cups of coffee, tea or cola drinks a day?
- After a meal, do you crave something sweet?
- In the evening, do you need an alcoholic drink to perk you up?
- Do you get headachy or grumpy without caffeine?
- Would you nod off if you didn't eat a sugary snack in the afternoon?
- Do you eat sweets every day?

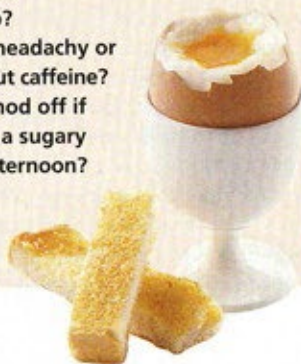
THE SOLUTION

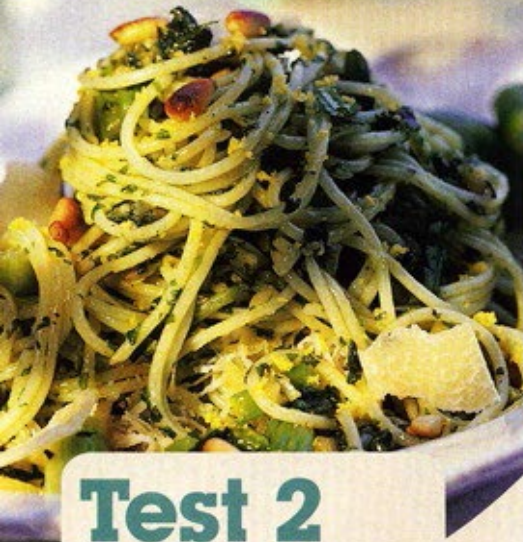
Energy without a fix

If you answered "yes" to three or more of these questions, you may be caught in an addictive cycle. Tea, coffee, cola and chocolate all contain stimulants that generate a rush of short-lived energy. Sugar and alcohol also give you a quick lift, but you shouldn't rely on any of these to keep you going when you need a boost. Break the habit by replacing them with more stable sources of energy.

- Eat regular meals. It's fine to snack in between, but choose fresh fruit, oatcakes or nuts rather than chocolate, cakes or biscuits.
- Instead of just a cup of coffee for breakfast, eat a boiled egg, sugar-free cereal, or wholemeal toast with peanut butter.

If you are craving stimulants, you need to make sure that your body is getting enough of the right kind of energy





Test 2

Are carbohydrates your downfall?

- Do you find it impossible to go without bread for a day?
- Do you need wheat (pasta or bread) or potatoes at every meal, or else end up still hungry?
- When you're peckish, would you prefer toast to fresh fruit?
- Do you lose concentration if you haven't eaten for a few hours?

THE SOLUTION

Choose "good" carbohydrates

If you answered "yes" to two or more of the questions above, you should think about the type of carbohydrates you are eating. Refined carbohydrates, such as white flour and white rice, are digested quickly, which is why you crave more. Switch to unrefined carbohydrates, which provide a more sustainable energy source.

- Buy wholemeal or rye bread instead of a white loaf.
- Swap mash for a jacket potato.
- Snack on wholemeal crispbreads and oatcakes, not cream crackers.
- Eat sugar-free porridge or muesli instead of sugary breakfast cereals.

Refined carbohydrates, such as white flour, have been stripped of their nutrients

Test 3

Are your cravings odd?

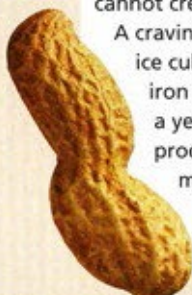
- Do you long for avocados, oily fish, nuts or seeds?
- Do you crave red meat or enjoy sucking ice cubes?
- Do you have to eat pickles?
- Do you add lots of seasoning to your food?

THE SOLUTION

Correct your deficiencies

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may be deficient in some vital nutrients. Craving avocados, oily fish, nuts or seeds may mean your diet is lacking in essential fatty acids. These are fats the body needs but cannot create for itself.

A craving for red meat or ice cubes may indicate an iron deficiency, while a yearning for dairy products and pickles may be a sign of a lack of calcium. Adding loads of



Eat a well-balanced, nutrient-rich diet to give your body everything it needs

seasoning to food suggests you might have a poor sense of taste or smell, which could be due to a zinc deficiency.

- Consider taking a multivitamin or specific supplement to boost

your levels of essential nutrients, such as Asda Omega 3 1000mg Fish Oil Capsules, £1.98 (30 capsules; 6.6p each).

- If your craving persists, it might be worth consulting a nutritional therapist to pinpoint any problems.

Cut down gradually, and remember you can still enjoy your desired food in moderation

Beat the cravings

- 1 Complete denial of what you're craving can lead to bingeing, so don't go cold turkey. Cut down gradually, and remember you can still enjoy your desired food – just do it in moderation.
- 2 If you experience a sudden urge to indulge in a snack, wait for 15 minutes or so. If you still have the craving, just eat a small amount – a few squares of chocolate or one biscuit, for example.
- 3 It can take up to three weeks for your taste buds to forget a flavour. So be patient with yourself. You'll crave the food less as each day passes.
- 4 Research from Japan has shown that exercise can help to reduce sweet cravings. So, when you get an urge to snack, go for a brisk walk instead.

