

12 Mental Tricks to Beat Cravings and Lose Weight

Most of us have tried to lose weight at some point or another. It may have been for a special occasion, a lifestyle change or any other reason, but we're all aware of the dedication and hard work it takes to beat cravings and lose weight.

Here are some ways you can make the process easier and more fun:

1. Visualize an internal pause button. "If someone were to ask to borrow a lot of money, most people can stop and say, 'I'll think about it,'" said Coral Arvon, Ph.D., director of behavioral health and wellness at Pritikin Longevity in Miami, Florida.

However, when it comes to taking care of our bodies when faced with chocolate cake or a favorite treat, we no longer have that internal filter.

"Think 'pause,' and consider your decision for 10 minutes before making an actual decision," Arvon suggested. If it makes the decision easier, visualize a big red 'Stop' sign or button that you can imagine whenever you're tempted to go for another slice.

2. Substitute junk food with healthy foods that resemble junk food. We are attracted to colorful candies and foods with interesting textures. When healthy foods resemble our favorite junk food, we are more tempted to substitute it. For example, for the crunch and salt of potato chips, you can make or buy crispy kale chips. Frozen yogurt and iced smoothies are a great substitute for ice cream. Over time, our taste buds and brain will adjust and learn to like these healthier options.

3. Imagine yourself eating. Thinking about eating a bag of

candy makes it more likely you'll eat less of it when you actually start eating it, according to a 2010 study by Carnegie Mellon University researchers. Study participants who visualized eating 30 M&Ms before indulging in a bowl of the candies ate fewer M&Ms than two other groups who imagined eating only three candies or no treats at all.

4. Tell yourself you can have anything. Diets where you are supposed to go hungry or eat a minuscule amount of food are never, ever successful. Putting yourself in control of a diet where you can are free to have whatever you like but choose not to is more powerful.

Amy Goodson, RD, sports dietitian for the Dallas Cowboys and co-author of *Swim, Bike, Run, Eat: The Complete Guide to Fueling Your Triathlon* says that "You want to make changes you can do for the rest of your life. The key is to eat what you want, but not everything you want," Goodson said. "You can still enjoy one to two splurges during the week as long as you stay on track the rest of the time."

5. Go back in time. Goodson offers another helpful tip to stay healthy: Portion off your snacks like you are back in preschool

"Many people get in trouble with snacking because they eat too much. So trick your mind into eating less by portioning your snacks in small baggies. This helps you feel as if you're eating 'all' of something, which satisfies your brain."

6. Plan your junk food. Planning and control are the two major factors that lead to a successful diet. There is no reason that you can't have your favorite junk food once in a while, if you are able to control and plan your junk food intake.

"Instead of waiting for a temptation to strike and only then trying to handle it, plan to have one indulgent or "junk" food a day, preferably after dinner," says Judith S. Beck, Ph.D., president of the Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy

in Philadelphia and clinical associate professor of psychology in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania. "It's easier to resist cravings during the day if you know you are going to have your favorite food that night.

It also helps to have healthier junk food such as nuts and trail mix around instead of waiting till you're really hungry and grabbing the first Doritos bag or chocolate bar you see.

7. Create a Top 10 list of distractions. Sometimes we eat out of sheer boredom instead of actual hunger. Create and write down a list of your 10 favorite things to do so that the next time a craving strikes, you can pick an activity from the list instead. List down things you enjoy, such as playing a video game, calling a friend, meditating or surfing online.

8. Fool your eye. Usually, people feel full when they see an empty plate. Essentially, you can 'fool' your eyes and your brain into thinking that you ate a lot by using smaller plates. Visual satisfaction leads to feeling satisfied with what you ate.

Another way to feel full is by focusing on the meal instead of the TV or your phone. Eating in only the kitchen or dining room—not in front of the TV—can also help you lose weight, according to a Cornell University study.

9. Train your resistance muscle. Along with the 'Pause' button, visualize a resistance muscle that you exercise every time you restrain from eating something unhealthy. Like every other muscle, it makes it more likely that the next time you have a craving you'll resist it.

10. Set your phone to send you motivational messages. Nowadays, we're barely ever without our smartphones. You can use your phone to set a reminder or show messages that encourage you to stick to your diet: "I could eat whatever I want, OR I can lose weight and be healthier," or "If I eat food I haven't planned to eat I'll get momentary satisfaction

but I'll feel bad later."

Observe yourself during the day to see at what times you usually get hungry. It may be that after lunch slump or after dinner if you stay up late working. Set messages for that time to remind yourself to snack healthy.

11. Stay clear of TV while eating. Two groups of women were studied while they snacked with or without TV. One group was offered one type of snack, while the other group had the choice of four snacks. Everyone ate more while watching the tube.

You might notice that you finish a bag of chips or junk food while you were watching your favorite episode. Your brain concentrates on the TV instead of the food and you inevitably end up overeating.

12. Use the "apple trick." Are you hungry enough to eat an apple? This is the core of the 'apple trick,' when you can figure out if you're genuinely hungry or just tempted to eat something you see around.

"When you crave a salty or sweet treat, ask yourself if you'd eat an apple," Goodson said. "If the answer is yes, you're hungry and it's OK to have a small snack. If not, drink some water, because you're not really hungry."

If you are looking to lose weight and keep it off, join Dr. Colbert's 42 Day Can Do Weightloss challenge by signing up for free at .

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