

How to Train Your Brain to Crave Healthy Food

It's possible to train your brain so that it not only likes, but actually craves healthy food, according to a new study published in the journal *Nutrition & Diabetes*.

The basic idea is that over time people acquire the habit, sometimes even addiction, to unhealthy and junk foods.

"We don't start out in life loving french fries and hating, for example, whole-wheat pasta," senior author Susan Roberts, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Energy Metabolism Laboratory, said in a statement.

"This conditioning happens over time in response to eating, repeatedly, what is out there in the toxic food environment."

Researchers tested a group of overweight and obese men and women, and after six months of eating healthy, lower-calorie foods, their brains began to respond positively to those healthy foods.

The researchers say they're encouraged that weight-loss programs can change what foods are tempting to people.

Crave Healthy Foods

Here are three steps to switch your cravings from high-calorie foods to healthy foods:

- **Clean out your cupboards.** Remove every bit of chocolate, every last spoon of ice cream, every single cookie, can of soda, sweet and bad treat from your home and, if possible, your workplace. If you need to buy chocolate for a special occasion, get rid of it immediately after.
- **Carry around healthy foods.** Bring an apple with you. Keep a box of high-fiber muesli in your car so you can

scoop up a handful whenever a chocolate craving hits. If you're going out for a while, and particularly if you expect that food temptations will be offered, bring your own healthy snacks with you. Perhaps a boiled egg, a banana or whatever's in the fruit bowl.

- **Bury craved foods in the middle of a meal.** If you eat chocolate at the start of a meal, your brain will associate chocolate with the relief of hunger as you "find" food. If you have chocolate at the end of a meal, your brain will come to expect a delicious sweet ritual at the end of every meal.

For the first two weeks, try to avoid all unhealthy craved foods. But after two weeks, allow yourself just a small portion of the craved food in the middle of the meal.

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