

A little of what you fancy DOES YOU GOOD

It's true. Giving in to your chocolate craving can actually be a good thing. Want to know how? Of course you do!



Healthy eating is hard work, isn't it? It's like having a salivating devil on one shoulder and a pursed-lipped angel on the other. The devil's urging you to tuck into that slab of chocolate cake, while the angel is reminding you that you're a glutton with the backside of an elephant and the self-control of a flea. Strict healthy eating doesn't just bring out the schizophrenic in you. It's boring, too. You're hardly likely to be the perfect party guest if you're cutting out booze and endlessly counting calories. Of course, you'd love to be lithe, but does that have to mean you turn into a diet bore who eats only macrobiotic muesli? No! We're here to tell – no, insist – that you simply must allow yourself a little indulgence. Because what's good for your soul is actually good for your body, too.

Mind over matter

Super-strict healthy eating is only for those with steely self-discipline. For the rest of us with weak wills and wobbly stomachs, strictness is a direct route to fixation. It's like the test psychologists use to demonstrate how our minds work. The one where they say, 'Relax, and don't think of a red balloon. Remember, don't think of a red balloon.' At which point you inevitably have a bright red balloon stubbornly floating across your mind's eye. It's the same with healthy eating. Don't think of a cream bun. No, I said don't think of a cream bun. But there it is, sneaking into your thoughts, urging you to take a bite.

It's called obsession. When you're being tough on bad foods, trying to cut them out completely, they're constantly there, tempting you. Instead, if you tell yourself that you can have an ice cream as a treat after lunch, then you won't spend all morning hallucinating about the dish of Häagen-Dazs you've insisted you can't eat. As Jane Kirby

says in *Dieting For Dummies* (IDG Books Worldwide, £14.99): 'The faster you give in and have a small portion of food you're craving, the better off you are.' The reason? It douses your desire.

This isn't just the diet industry's latest ploy. Scientists are fast coming to the same conclusion: that overly strict dieting regimes simply don't work. Researchers at Brigham Women's Hospital and Harvard School of Public Health in America studied two groups of dieters – one on a low-fat diet and one on a moderate-fat diet. The latter group was the more successful. The low-fat dieters couldn't keep the regime up – 80% dropped out, whereas less than half the moderate-fat eaters gave up. And, better still, those eating more fat shed more weight, too. They each lost about 5kg (11lb) over 18 months, whereas those on the strict low-fat diets lost only 2.7kg (6lb) each. So there's the proof – allowing yourself a little of what you like boosts both your morale and your willpower.

Try not to think of a cream bun and it will sneak into your thoughts, urging you to take a bite

CONTINUED OVER PAGE

Text/Jane Yeltram. Photographs/Anthony Blake
Photo library, Cephas, Dotting Kindersley

Listen to your *cravings*

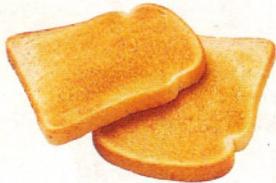
We've all had them, those moments of desperate desire for food that just can't be denied – when you'd make a break to the corner shop in face pack and pyjamas because you can't last another minute without chocolate. So what should you do about it? The answer is simple: give in. According to the American Dietetic Association, holding out is when 'a craving becomes an overwhelming force and overeating often results'.

Although the experts are divided as to whether cravings mean you're lacking in a particular nutrient, your body can certainly trigger a craving for a reason – when your energy's flagging, for example, or because your mood needs a boost.

If you crave
something...

You
need...

Stodgy, like buttered toast or chips



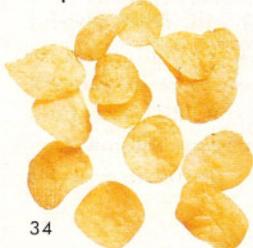
Sugary, like sweets



Rich, like chocolate or cheese



Salty, like crisps or peanuts



Carbohydrate, which stimulates the release of the brain chemical serotonin, to calm you down and make you feel relaxed.

Energy in the form of a quick sugar fix. Sugar is another form of carbohydrate so it also boosts the body's relaxing serotonin levels.

Fat, which triggers the release of endorphins in the brain – these are the natural stimulants that give you a buzz of wellbeing.

Fluid. Some salt is needed to maintain fluid balance so you could be dehydrated. Many women also crave salt if they're feeling premenstrual.

The top 10 and how to indulge

Temptation Solution

Chips

We know they're greasy and loaded with calories but, as comfort food, nothing beats them.



■ Make your own chunkier chips – that way there's more potato, less fat: par-boil the potatoes, then cut into chunks, drizzle with olive oil and bake in the oven. This method is much better than deep-fat frying.

■ Leave skins on the potatoes to maximise the nutritional value. The nutrients are more highly concentrated just under the skin.

■ If you're going to fry, the British Nutrition Foundation's advice is to keep the cooking fat hot so less is absorbed, and to drain the chips on kitchen paper before eating them.

■ If you can't make your own, use oven chips. They contain just 4% fat, whereas thinly cut fries are over a fifth fat.

Potato crisps

When you lust after savoury flavours, crisps can be an irresistible snack.



■ Look out for lower-fat varieties or, better still, crisps that have been baked rather than fried. Sainsbury's Bakes (99p per 100g) contain 351 calories and 2.3g of fat per 100g, compared to 540 calories and 15g fat per 100g for traditional fried crisps.

■ If you love creamy dips for dunking, go for low-fat tzatziki, not high-fat sour cream.

Sweets

If you absolutely must have a sweet fix, go for ones that aren't pure sugar but contain some healthy ingredients, too.

■ Liquorice contains lots of iron.

■ Wine gums are high in iron, calcium and potassium.

■ Eat them in one go. It's better for your teeth to have one single sugar attack than several small hits.



Cakes and cookies

Habit plays a large part in cravings. If your wind-down time includes a cup of tea and a biscuit, it can be hard to give up.



■ Go for fruit cakes – dried fruit contains fibre, iron and potassium.

■ Choose cakes without icing or marzipan.

■ Remember that not all biscuits are created equal. Compare these calorie counts: large shortbread round, 107cals; chocolate digestive, 87cals; chocolate chip, 55cals; ginger snap, 48cals; Rich Tea, 36cals.

Alcohol

It's good for your heart and a great de-stresser – as long as you're careful not to overdo it.

■ Choose wine or beer, not spirits.

■ Drink with a meal and always drink lots of water at the same time to stave off dehydration.



temptations

in them with a clear conscience

Cheese

Cheese is high in calcium and protein and an important source of vitamin B12 for vegetarians. It's also good for your teeth. If you eat it after sugary food, it can halve the number of cavities caused by sugar.

- Try reduced-fat hard cheeses or low-fat soft cheeses such as Philadelphia Light.
- If you often overdo the cheese, use a cheese parer to slice it for sandwiches or crackers as you'll get a thinner sliver than if you use an ordinary knife.



Chocolate

Delicious, creamy and melt-in-your-mouth, it's women's all-time number one craving.



- Choose dark chocolate – it's higher in iron.
- Save your fix for when cravings are highest, such as after dinner.
- Buy kids' funsize chocs (there's no way you'll stick to just a bite of a grown-up size Mars bar).
- If you're cooking with chocolate, use cocoa powder instead of solid chocolate to get the taste without the fat.

Peanuts

They're high in fat, but not all fats are bad. Like olive oil, peanuts are rich in monounsaturated fatty acids, which help in the fight against bad cholesterol. Don't overdo it, however, as all fats are very high in calories.

- Choose the unsalted variety and mix with raisins so each mouthful includes fruit, too.
- Go for chestnuts instead – the only low-fat nuts there are.



Bread and potatoes

These are super-healthy in themselves – it's what you put on or in them that makes the difference.

- Cut bread thickly, spread butter thinly.
- Use skimmed milk in mashed potatoes.
- Try natural yogurt with spring onion and chopped root ginger as a creamy filling for baked potatoes.



Ice cream

Though high in fat, dairy ice cream is packed with calcium. As Dr Wendy Doyle of the British Dietetic Association (BDA) says, 'People dieting lose bone density, so you need to keep up calcium levels.'

- Try frozen yogurt – lots of calcium but little fat.
- Dr Colette Kelly of the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF) recommends piling lots of fresh fruit into the bowl with your ice cream as it will look as if you're having a big helping while keeping fat levels low.
- Water ice and sorbet are delicious but virtually fat free.



What's bad *is good*

Even the naughtiest-seeming foods contain nutrients that are good news for your body. So don't deny yourself, just eat them in moderation.

Chocolate

WHAT'S NAUGHTY? High in fat and sugar.

WHAT'S NICE? Chocolate contains flavonoids, which lower bad cholesterol and inhibit blood clotting. So chocolate can be good for your heart, as long as you don't overdo it. It also contains iron, which helps to keep red blood cells healthy. According to the BNF's Dr Colette Kelly, 'Cocoa contains more iron than almost any other plant-derived food. Only curry powder contains a higher concentration.'

Chips and crisps

WHAT'S NAUGHTY? Lots of fat because of the frying process, plus salt on crisps.

WHAT'S NICE? Potatoes contain complex carbohydrate for energy, as well as protein, iron, vitamin C, B vitamins, potassium and fibre.

Ice cream

WHAT'S NAUGHTY? Fat and sugar.

WHAT'S NICE? All dairy products are high in calcium, which is essential for healthy bones and teeth, as well as for staving off osteoporosis.

Peanuts

WHAT'S NAUGHTY? High in fat and salt.

WHAT'S NICE? Peanuts are packed with protein, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Wine

WHAT'S NAUGHTY? The alcohol content – but only if you drink more than 14 units a week.

WHAT'S NICE? Like chocolate, wine is full of flavonoids, so it can protect against heart disease. But limit yourself to two glasses a day.

Useful contacts The British Nutrition Foundation (020 7404 6504; www.nutrition.org.uk). The British Dietetic Association (0121 200 8080; www.bda.uk.com).

