

## Taming Those Sugar Cravings

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**Does that morning doughnut leave you craving another treat two hours later?** Do you feel the need to grab a candy bar to cope with your afternoon slump -- and then reach for a cola to get out of your post-slump slump?

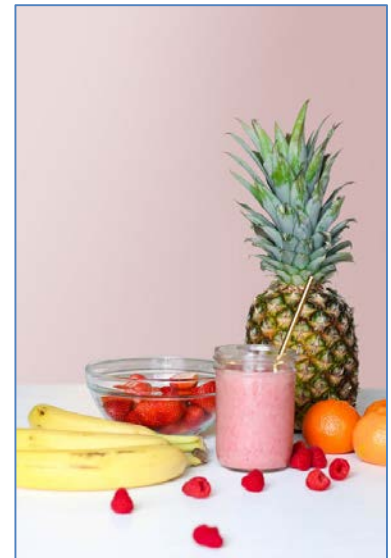
If you've found that munching sugary snacks makes you crave them more, you're not alone. Eating lots of simple carbohydrates -- without the backup of proteins or fats -- can quickly satisfy hunger and give your body a short-term energy boost, but they almost as quickly leave you famished again and craving more. **Luckily, there are some things you can do to help you tame those pesky sugar cravings.**

Added sugar in our diet is discouraged by nutritionists for two main reasons. First, it is linked to weight gain and cavities. Second, sugar provides "empty calories" because it lacks any nutritional contribution, and too much sugar in your diet can crowd out more healthful foods.

Sugar-sweetened beverages are by far the greatest sources of added sugar in the diet and account for more than one-third of the added sugar consumed as a nation. Other popular high-sugar foods include cookies, cakes, pastries, ice-cream, candy, and ready-to-eat cereals.

People crave sweet things for a number of reasons. "Sweet is the first taste humans prefer from birth," says Christine Gerbstadt, MD, RD, a dietitian and American Dietetic Association (ADA) spokeswoman. Carbohydrates, especially sugar, stimulate the "feel-good" chemical dopamine in the brain.

Consumption of foods and beverages high in sugar is also linked to stress. Feelings of stress can cause poor sleep, which can affect your hormone levels and cause you to crave sugary, high-calorie foods.



**Here are a few tips that may help you tame sugar cravings.**

-Combine a sugary food you are craving with a healthful one. Dip a banana or strawberry in chocolate sauce, or mix some almonds with a few chocolate chips.

-When a sugar craving hits, walk away. Do something to change the scenery and get your mind off the food you are thinking about. Get out and take a walk or get some type of exercise.

-If you need to splurge on something sweet, go for quality — not quantity. Choose a delightful chocolate truffle over a king-sized candy bar, or split a decadent dessert with one or two other people.

-Skip artificial sweeteners. Research has shown that diet drinks and artificial sweeteners may increase your craving for sugar.

-Eat regularly throughout the day. If you wait too long between meals you could set yourself up to choose sugary, fatty foods to curb hunger. Eat something every 3 to 5 hours to keep your blood sugar stable.

-Slow down and focus. Often, poor food choices result from a lack of planning. Slow down, focus, and plan what you are going to eat so you are ready to make a healthful food choice, even when you are desperate.

-Eat just a little of what you are craving and allow yourself to enjoy what you love. Keep a sweet treat to 150 calories or less.

-Replace a candy dish with a bowl of fruit for when sugar cravings hit. If you like something sweet at the end of a meal, go for a fruit-based dessert or plain fruit. To curb a soda habit, try mixing a little fruit juice with seltzer water.

Find more information about these topics and others, by contacting the Wildcat Extension District offices at: Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Wilson County, 620-378-2167; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district](http://www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district).

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