

“Weighing In” Newsletter

September 2017

Overcoming My Cravings and My Desires

One interesting question we ask on our physical form here at The Weigh Station is about food cravings. There's a lot of food research recently in the areas of the brain involving cravings. In a recent study, the lead investigator, Dr. Marcia Levin Pelchat from the Pennsylvania University School of Medicine used a functional MRI scanner to reveal that food cravings activate brain areas related to emotional memory and reward. She stated that the MRI results were "consistent with cravings of all kinds, whether it's for food, drugs, or designers shoes."

Interestingly, the three regions of the brain the hyper campus, the insula, and the caudate nucleus are activated by food cravings. These three areas of the brain also have been reported to be involved in drug cravings. The imaging part of the study showed MRI results that suggest that the memory areas of the brain responsible for food association with rewards are more important to food cravings than the actual reward centers in the brain. The study goes on to say "this result fits nicely with animal research that has shown that the stimulation of the memory center is more effective than the stimulation reward centers in getting animals to work for drug rewards." Food cravings are very common; surveys estimate almost 100% of young women and 70% of young men have experienced cravings in the past year.

One of the things we have noticed at The Weigh Station is that once patients give into their cravings, they continue down the same path.

Just recently a woman who had lost 112 pounds gradually started to gain some back until she quit coming so I questioned her as to why she had quit coming, she said:

"I was embarrassed to let you know that I started eating wrong again."

I asked her what had triggered the old pattern and she said,

"my son bought me a gallon of chocolate ice cream I decided I would just take a couple of bites and before you knew it the gallon was gone."

Why is it so hard to walk away from this part of our appetite?

It's because once the reward center is activated you remember how good things taste. You may even remember where you first had the treat that you're enjoying and the memory may also trigger the craving to occur over and over again. One of the many reasons we work so hard to help you get to the root of what is causing your cravings is because if you aren't able to overcome the root cause while in the program, you will lack the tools necessary to keep the cravings at bay later and old habits will creep back in.

The same study done at the University of Pennsylvania also showed that our sense of smell triggers the "feel good" sensation in our brain. We've all done it, we smell something and follow it to its source, and sometimes that particular smell brings back memories of childhood, even into

adulthood, reminding us of circumstances that were pleasurable.

It is imperative that we work to help you get through your craving mechanisms, as common as they are; they are disruptive in weight management.

As anyone who's raided the fridge while watching late-night TV knows, you're at prime risk for furious snacking at night. According to a study published in *The Journal of Obesity*, "It's the work of your circadian system, which amps up cravings come sundown, telling you to keep eating to store energy until the next meal." "Your food urges peak at 8 p.m. and stay high until midnight. Therefore, the later you stay up, the more food you're likely to eat." explains Steven Shea, Ph.D. from Oregon Health and Sciences University and the senior author on the study. In addition, not getting enough sleep also triggers the release of hormones that are linked to hunger, which can spark more cravings the next day.

To overcome this, here are a few ideas that I came across from several gurus on cravings. (Most of the studies were done at the University of Pennsylvania and at NIH.)

"Skip artificial sweeteners. Artificial sweeteners may sound like a great idea, but they don't lessen cravings for sugar and haven't demonstrated a positive effect on our obesity epidemic." says Dave Grotto, RD, LDN and author of *101 Foods That Could Save Your Life*.

Slow down. For one week, focus on your sugar cravings and think about what you're eating, suggests Judy Chambers, LCSW, CAS, a certified addiction specialist. "Diet mayhem often results from lack of planning. So slow down, plan, and eat what you intend to eat, instead of eating when you're desperate."

Get support. Many people turn to sweet foods when they're stressed, depressed, or angry. But food doesn't solve emotional issues. Consider whether emotions are involved in your sugar cravings and whether you need help to find other solutions to those emotional problems.

Mix it up. You may need more than one strategy to thwart sugar cravings. One week you may find success with one tactic, and another week calls for an alternative approach. What's important is to "have a 'bag of tricks' to try," says Christine Gerbstadt, who is a Registered Dietitian. Kerry Neville, another Dietitian agrees that to tame sugar cravings, you need to "figure out what works for you".

Lastly, go easy on yourself. It may take time to get a handle on your sugar cravings. "It's difficult to shift any system -- whether it's the world economy or you're eating." Judy Chambers says.

As you start into another month of trying to get it right, remember that cravings are healthy, its how you deal with them that can be a problem. We are here to help you; we all have encountered different patients with the various challenges due to cravings, and can offer advice and tips anytime.

Wouldn't it be nice if we all could work together to help one another overcome what we are craving? The emptiness that many are trying to fill with food will never be satisfied with food.

There are other resources that can help you feel filled up and satisfied instead of food. For me, it's my relationship with the Lord. I find that early in the morning my quiet time makes my day much easier. Psalms 119:147 – arise early, before the sun is up: I cry out for your help and put my hope in your words. Rise, early folks, it works.

Blessings,
Chuck Shaffer MD.

Why Second Time Around Weight Loss may be Slower than the First:

Lately I have been hearing from our restart patients that the second time around is slower than the first time when it comes to losing weight. It can be frustrating since they are following the program by the book yet the weight isn't moving quite as quickly as they would like. There are several reasons for this:

Aging

Many times it's been more than five years since we have seen a patient. Unfortunately, each decade our metabolisms slow down and we lose muscle mass (which is metabolic). These changes can affect how quickly the weight comes off. Just as it's a little more difficult to run a 5k at age 46 compared to 41, it's a little more difficult to get everything moving with a low-carb diet when you're a couple of years older.

Survival mechanisms

We as humans are very complex creatures. Although the Weigh Station's dietary recommendations are fairly straight forward, our bodies are not as simplistic. Not only are our metabolisms complicated and often dictated by greatly by the liver, we also have multiple neurological and endocrinological feedback pathways between the liver and central nervous system. In addition, gut hormones also send signals of fullness or hunger. It is a convoluted system intended to allow us to survive on all kinds of food and to keep us alive as long as possible in the face of starvation. This system is also similar to our immune system in that it has its own memory. It can be fooled once or twice, but then it begins to remember.

Just about anyone who has done the Weigh Station's program for the first time can attest to how quickly they see results. Pounds seem to fall off effortlessly once they get going. After a while though, clients are bound to see a plateau. This is especially common when we become creatures of habit and eat the same things over and over. This phenomenon occurs less with a low-carb diets that are rotated because the body is getting all the nutrition it needs, so it doesn't rebel quite the same as it does with some other nutritionally inadequate diets or a diet where you are constantly exposed to the same foods over and over. None the less, it does rebel a little. And worse, it remembers.

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So, if you lose weight then regain it and re-restart the program the body remembers and is not so willing to forgo the first pounds as quickly as it did the first time. If you have an off week, like many people do and then try again for another week before deviating again, it will probably be at least another week before you begin to lose fat again. The body says, “Well, here we go again with another week of this yoyo dieting. Let’s hold steady and we’ll be back to our regular high-carb way of eating within a week. Let’s not go into starvation mode yet and starting getting rid of our fat.” What happens is overtime you will lose almost nothing the first week whereas before you may have lost much more. Doubt then creeps in and you begin to wonder if the program will really work for you. It will, but you’ve got to get past the body’s diet memory for it to.

Increased hormonal resistance

Although there is limited research in this area, some studies have indicated that we become progressively more insulin and leptin resistant as we get older. This is especially true for people who have maintained a high BMI. Unfortunately, this is also true for those who were overweight or obese and lost the weight. The more insulin and leptin resistance we are, the more difficult it is to lose weight. So, the increase in this phenomenon just from a few years passing by between the first and second go around can make a difference.

Hormonal dysfunction

Women in their 30’s and 40’s who are successful on our program eventually hit menopause then try again and find it much harder to lose. Many times this is due to hormone changes related to menopause. Finding ways to balance these changes can take time. Even if the hormones do get back to where they need to be quickly, it takes more time for the body to respond. Often just getting the hormones balanced results in weight loss on its own without dietary intervention.

Lack of commitment

The first time around, people make a major commitment. They lose weight. They feel better than they have in years. They are excited and focused. Then they either continue into maintenance or they don’t. If they don’t, the weight often comes back. Then years later when they decide to restart they just don’t have the commitment they did the first time around. Don’t get me wrong, sometimes it’s just the opposite, they are more determined than ever to succeed and have learned from past mistakes, but not always.

People sneak in low carb “cheat foods”

The first time around on a low-carb diet is exciting. Clients are actually getting to eat all these forbidden foods : heavy whipping cream, steak, real butter, it’s unbelievable! But sooner or later, they get a little tired of steak, cream and real butter and you start looking to expand your food choices. Many think that if they limit their carbs, they can enjoy keto friendly desserts, bars and other items not listed in the book. They make low-carb brownies, eat Atkin’s bars on the go

and drink protein shakes. Then they find out about low-carb, pancakes, bagels, etc. and discover that there is a whole low-carb world of what they always thought of as high-carb foods. They are in heaven. But around about this time, the weight loss starts to really taper off or may stop altogether.

A few years later, they've regained the lost weight plus some. They remember how effortlessly they lost it on a low-carb diet, and decide to do it again. But this time, instead of starting with the steak, cream and real butter all alone, they assume they can also work in a little almond flour, Atkins bars and protein shakes. Strangely, the low-carb diet just doesn't seem to work as well this next time around.

If you want to be successful the next time around on a low-carb diet, you've got to follow the program. This is a lifestyle change and it takes commitment. Realize it's going to be a little more difficult than it was the first time for reasons that may be both in or out of your control. Stick to it, you want to hang in there until you get to what was called the dynamic weight stage. The dynamic weight stage is when weight is changing quickly in either an upward or downward direction. Anyone who has gained or lost a lot of weight has experienced this. You can gain quickly once you get into this phase, but ultimately you stabilize and hit the static weight phase. It works the opposite way too, once you get your weight loss momentum built up, you seem to lose effortlessly while in this dynamic phase. This is where you want to be! But you have to follow the program consistently for a few solid weeks to get there. You can't just go about it half way, go on a few days and off, fill up on calorie-dense, low-or-no-carb junk. Make a commitment to do the program by the book and make sure to stay the course!

-Tricia Foley, MS., RD