FOOD CRAVINGS CAN REVEAL IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Food cravings are nothing new or unusual. Many men and women will go through periods in their life where hankerings for certain food groups become full blown binges. It’s when these binges become a regular occurrence that they are termed cravings. So if you think it only affects pregnant women you might be in for a surprise. But what turns a yearning for a tasty ham sandwich or gorgeous chocolate bar into a craving?

It starts off with appetite
Millions of people are currently dieting and rueing their desires towards high calorie foods be they sugar or fat rich. They’re aware how demanding their appetite can be. Appetite begins in the stomach where a hormone called ghrelin (pronounced ‘grellin’) is produced by an empty stomach. If you haven’t eaten in a while you’ll be familiar with the blood sugar drop which makes you feel very lethargic, headachy and glum. A quick munch on something tasty and your body produces insulin to balance the sugars in your blood. The stomach releases leptin, the counterpart to ghrelin and gives you the satisfied hunger feeling.
Other chemical forces are at work too. Eating foods high in sugar or fat prompt the brain to release dopamine, commonly known as the ‘pleasure hormone’ that is also released when you orgasm or indulge in illicit drugs. The brain also rewards us with a release of opioids promoting a feeling of well-being and immunity to mild pain. Exposure to external opioids such as morphine and heroin has a similar, but more pronounced, effect. Read more.
Evolutionary-wise this dopamine and opioids cocktail hit is an essential reward system since high energy foods are crucial to keep us warm-blooded animals alive. It’s not so helpful to us today when access to high calorie foods is too plentiful.

**Too simple?**
The preceding section is a simplified version of the origins and satiation of hunger pangs but it must also be remembered that psychological influences and other factors can play a significant part in our choice of foods but they are outside the scope of this article.
I’d recommend reading this article in Psychology Today for more information on how appetite, hormone release and hunger pangs are the tip of the chemical iceberg.

**Cancer Detection?**

Speaking of icebergs, there was an article on the Mail Online concerning a lady, Mrs Elsie Campbell, whose sudden onset of cravings for iceberg lettuce soon became a routine of her eating between three and four a day. These unusual cravings prompted her research scientist husband into action. Green leafy, cruciferous vegetables contain the mineral selenium and organic chemical, sulphorafane, which are known to have anti-cancer properties and cancer sufferers are often found to be deficient in them. Surely enough, Mrs Campbell discovered a lump in her breast which turned out to be malignant. Spotting it early had made her prognosis more promising and, thankfully, following treatment she was given the all-clear. She no longer craves lettuce.

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**Pica – One of the Odder Symptoms of Anaemia**

Pica is loosely described as an eating disorder where food cravings are for non-food items. Sufferers will consume soil, sand, chalk and other less appealing things.
Anaemia is a condition brought on where an individual either has an iron deficiency or a problem metabolising iron to form haemoglobin – the red blood cells. Symptoms of anaemia include extreme lethargy, breathlessness and characterised by pale gums. Untreated, this condition can be life shortening or, if severe enough, even fatal. It is thought that the iron content found in soil may drive the impulse to consume it. Aside from psychological and behavioural causes, pica has also been linked to zinc deficiencies.
Candida/Yeast Infections
Although, not life threatening, candidiasis can have extremely uncomfortable symptoms and can affect your quality of life. It can lead to leaky gut syndrome when the yeast begins to form rhizoids in the intestines that allow yeast, bacteria and food into the bloodstream.

A cravings for sugar rich foods, refined carbohydrates or alcohol can often be a symptom of a yeast infection as sugar is what the yeast thrives on to grow and develop. Read more.
Source Craving chocolate means you have a Vitamin C problem or maybe a lack of commitment in a relationship.
What other foods can you crave?
The list is almost endless but some of the most common food cravings that indicate nutrient deficiencies are elaborated on in an excellent article by Dr. Carol Ann Fischer. I’ve summarised the craving and the possible causes below.
1. Breads, pasta and potatoes: general lack of minerals

2. Milk: calcium and protein deficiency

3. Salt and coffee: weak adrenal gland function

4. Chocolate: calcium and magnesium deficiency

5. Onions and Garlic: liver stress due to low sulphur intake

Cravings Can Save Your Life
There is plenty of evidence to support how cravings can be beneficial in that they point towards a more serious condition. The human body needs a complex range of minerals and chemicals to run smoothly, to ward off infection and to ensure that it survives and prospers. While today we have a surfeit of high sugar and high fat foods, the other essential nutrients are more likely to be missed. So the next time you get cravings that last a few days or more I’d advise you discuss it with your GP just in case.

Sometimes, just sometimes, a craving is just that desire for a tasty treat.
**Sugar Addiction: The Perpetual Cycle**

1. **You Eat Sugar**
   - You like it, you crave it.
   - It has addictive properties.

2. **Blood Sugar Levels Spike**
   - Dopamine is released in the brain = addiction.
   - Mass insulin secreted to drop blood sugar levels.

3. **Blood Sugar Levels Fall Rapidly**
   - High insulin levels cause immediate fat storage.
   - Body craves the lost sugar ‘high’.

4. **Hunger & Cravings**
   - Low blood sugar levels cause increased appetite and cravings.
   - Thus the cycle is repeated.

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Please feel free to share this infographic courtesy of Weight Loss Ninja.org/Sugar Detox.