WHY IT'S SO EASY TO OVEREAT JUNK FOOD AND 7 WAYS TO STOP

Can't resist the chips…cookies…ice cream? It's normal to feel out of control. Processed foods are designed to make us overeat. Here's how it works – and what to do about it.

MARKETING TRICKS MAKE PROCESSED FOODS SEEM "GOOD FOR YOU"

In reality, often there is very little nutritional difference between the organic treat and the conventional one.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 2 cookies
Calories 120
Total Fat 6g
Saturated Fat 3g
Total Carbohydrate 15g
Sugars 7g
Protein 1g
Sodium 75g

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 2 cookies
Calories 120
Total Fat 6g
Saturated Fat 4.5g
Total Carbohydrate 15g
Sugars 7g
Protein 1g
Sodium 75g

BIG PORTIONS CONVINCE US WE'RE GETTING A "GOOD DEAL"

With processed foods, you're often getting more volume (and more calories). Who doesn't want more for less?

VARIETY MAKES US WANT MORE

When we have lots of different tastes to choose from, we have lots of appetite. And when it comes to processed foods, the options seem endless.

HARDER TO OVEREAT: One single food, like apples.

EASIER TO OVEREAT: A variety of flavors and textures to amuse you forever.

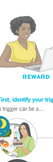
MULTIPLE FLAVORS AT ONCE = PARTY IN YOUR MOUTH

Long ago, humans prioritized calorie-dense foods to help them survive. Today, manufacturers use calorie density to create hyperpalatable (and easily accessible) junk food.

The anatomy of an irresistible bite

Stimuli Stacking

Sugar, fat, and salt aren't that appealing on their own. But combined in the form of a treat (like a salted caramel brownie) they're irresistible.



The Big Five

To make it to mass market, processed foods must be:

1. Calorie-dense, usually high in sugar and/or fat
2. Intensely flavored
3. Immediately delicious, love-at-first-taste
4. Melted down easily — the food almost dissolves in your mouth
5. Easy to eat — no effortful chewing needed

One major restaurant chain actually injects its fries with more flavor and texture (so it requires less chewing)

7 WAYS TO STOP OVEREATING JUNK FOOD

Now that you know how deliciousness gets manufactured, use these strategies to build awareness of your behavior and control treat consumption.

1 NOTICE YOUR CHEWING

It's easier to overeat when food is easy to chew. A fun experiment: Compare how many chews it takes to swallow processed vs. whole foods.

Also consider:

- How long it takes to eat each food
- How satiated you feel afterwards
- How much you want to keep eating

PROCESSED FOODS ~10 chews

WHOLE FOODS ~25 chews

2 EVALUATE YOUR PANTRY

To change the way you grocery shop and eat, first become aware of what kinds of food you buy – and why you buy them.

- How many junk foods marketed as "health foods" can you find?
- How many celebrity endorsements do you see?
- What self-care promises do you find?
- List the number of treat foods you have in your kitchen.

3 LOOK FOR HABIT PATTERNS

Habits are powerful, for better or worse. When we have a habit of using food for reasons other than physical hunger, it can lead to overeating.

First, identify your triggers

A trigger can be a…

When you have the urge to overeat, ask yourself:

This self-knowledge will help you prevent triggered eating in the future.

4 FIND FEEL-GOOD HABITS THAT SUPPORT YOUR GOALS

Once you know your triggers, disrupt the cycle of trigger > eat > reward by replacing eating with an activity that supports your goals.

Most effective stress relievers:

- Exercising and playing sports
- Reading
- Listening to music
- Praying or attending a religious service
- Spending time with friends and family
- Getting a massage
- Walking outside
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Creative hobbies

These habits boost neurotransmitters like serotonin, GABA, and oxytocin, which calm down the stress response and induce a feeling of wellbeing.

5 PUT QUALITY ABOVE QUANTITY

Processed foods use cheap ingredients, making it possible to sell large quantities at a low price.

Use the "traffic light" system to put quality first

Make your own list of red, yellow, and green light foods.

"Red" foods are "no-go's" that you tend to overeat, make you feel sick, or don't help you meet your goals.

"Yellow" foods aren't the worst choices, but if you eat too much of them you might have regrets.

"Green" foods are nutritious and make your body and mind feel good. Eat these whenever you want.

Your list may be unique to you – i.e. chocolate chip cookies might be "red" for you, but "green" for your friend.

6 SLOW DOWN

If changing the foods you eat freaks you out, allow yourself to eat whatever you want, but slowly and mindfully.

- ✓ Sit at a table and use real dishes.
- ✓ Eat in a calm environment with no distractions.
- ✓ Put your utensils down between bites.

- ✓ Set aside at least 20 minutes per meal.
- ✓ Choose whole, fiber-rich foods that take time to chew.
- ✓ Eat to 80 percent full.

7 BE NICE TO YOURSELF

Self-criticism and crash dieting may work in the short term, but they usually sabotage your goals in the long term. Approach your overeating with…

HONESTY
How are you really behaving around food? The more accurate you are at perceiving yourself, the better you can support yourself to change.

KINDNESS
Work with yourself instead of against yourself.

CURIOSITY
Explore your habits with openness and interest, not criticism.

For the full article exploring this infographic, see:
https://www.precisionnutrition.com/why-you-stop-overeating

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