



## How to combat carb cravings?

The type of foods we reach for can be starchy carbohydrates like something 'bready' (bagel, baguette, toast), something 'salty' (crisps, chips, mash, pasty) or something 'sweet' (cake, donuts, pastry, biscuits and sugary chocolate). Let's face it, even the saintliest eater can find winter challenging!

Winter is also when those carbs get a bad reputation, as we automatically associate them with weight gain, when really, it's the consumption of excess calories that tends to be the real culprit.

## Why do we crave carbs?

### 1 Your brain

Your brain runs exclusively on glucose, so when blood sugar drops, you may choose foods that quickly cause your blood sugar to rise, rather than making a more informed choice that will help you in the long run. Spikes are followed by a downward curve which often perpetuates the glucose rollercoaster.

**Prevention:** Eat in a way that keeps your blood sugar stable, consume a meal or snack of protein, fibre and fat every three to five hours.

### 2 The weather

Serotonin - also known as the 'feel good' hormone - is synthesized from tryptophan (an essential amino acid that comes from food) which is activated by the vitamin D hormone. Less exposure to natural sunlight in the winter months could lead to a vitamin D deficiency which affects serotonin levels. This could prompt the brain to demand more simple carbs (and sugar), to indirectly stimulate serotonin production.

**Prevention:** Get outside for at least 10-15 minutes of natural sun exposure (reading glasses are fine, but not sunglasses). Consider supplementing your diet with Vitamin D3 and omega 3 fatty acids.

### 3 Stress and lack of sleep

During times of stress, the body's cortisol levels rise, which can increase appetite and cravings for hyperpalatable foods, or foods high in fat, salt, sugar, or carbs. The same can happen when we don't get good quality sleep.

**Prevention:** Integrate relaxation techniques into your routine. Try a guided meditation, breathing exercises, colouring in, or doodling. If self-help techniques aren't working for you, consider talking to a professional for specific support.

## 4 Hunger

Hunger is not food-specific, the brain doesn't specify what carbohydrates it wants, so the key to managing carb cravings when you're hungry is meal prep. Not all carbs are created equal.

**Prevention:** Make intelligent winter food swaps. If you are hungry, eat something with 20 grams of protein (at least), a fibre-rich carbohydrate and healthy fat.

## 5 Habit

Let's be honest, sometimes you reach for carbs not out of hunger but boredom. Maybe it's your habit to automatically have something sweet after a meal or have a couple of Hobnobs with 10am tea? What about the giant pack of Walker's watching late night tv?

**Prevention:** Keep your brain busy. Practice paying attention to why you're eating, slow down to savour the taste of your food, and focus on the moment. If you're bored, find something else to do, like play a game on an app or take a brief walk around the block.

### Repeat after us

***There is nothing wrong with giving yourself permission to enjoy the foods you love – just do it consciously!***

You don't need to avoid carbs, but making better choices will reduce cravings and limit the impact on your weight and waistline.