

7 Tips For Beating Your Sugar Cravings



Sugar cravings can derail even the most disciplined diet. You can eat well 90 percent of the time, but a few slip-ups every day can make you feel awful and stall your progress.

Sugar is okay as an occasional treat. But most of us are eating way too much of it. It's processed extremely quickly in the body. So you get a quick burst of energy, then a vicious crash. Eating it all the time can lead to weight gain, type 2 diabetes, and a host of other health issues.

Most of us know these things. Yet we still find ourselves giving into sugar cravings - or driving ourselves nuts thinking about that candy bar in our desk.

How can we stop these cravings in their tracks?

Keep reading to see how!

Why Willpower Alone Isn't Enough

When asked how they handle cravings for junk food, hardcore fitness types will give you answers like “Just tough it out!”

This places an enormous strain on your willpower. Sometimes fighting cravings like this can work, but others it feels impossible to resist.

Why?

Some psychology experiments suggest that willpower is a limited resource. We only have so much of it to work with each day, and when we run out, we find ourselves making pleasurable short-term choices at the expense of our long-term goals.

To make matters even worse, if you use all your willpower to fight sugar cravings, other poor decisions (skipping workouts, slacking off at work, etc.) might slip in unnoticed.

It's time to stop beating ourselves up for not being perfect when relying on willpower alone. What we need is a practical plan for when your willpower comes up short.

How to Tame Your Sweet Tooth

Here are seven cool things you can try to beat sugar cravings for good.

1. Eat Sweet Foods That Are Good for You

It sounds counterintuitive, but sometimes the easiest way to beat a sugar craving is to give in to it.

When most of us have a craving, we're imagining cookies or candy or doughnuts. There are plenty of other sweet foods that are much healthier and can give your taste buds their sugar fix.

Next time you're dreaming of that pastry, what if you just replaced it with one of the items below instead?

- Dark chocolate
- Fruit (apples, bananas, berries, coconut flakes, etc.)
- Smoothies
- Sweet vegetables (butternut squash, carrots, sweet potatoes, etc.)

These probably aren't the first things you think of when a craving strikes. But if you condition your body to expect a different kind of sweet reward, you can change your palate. The options above taste sweet, but they have a much lower sugar content than processed treats.

If you do this long enough, don't be surprised if some of the old foods that used to appeal to you start to seem too sweet. This happened to me when I tried Coke months after giving up soda; something I used to enjoy became undrinkable.

2. Replace Bad Habits with Positive Ones

One of the most powerful ways to change your behavior is to replace bad habits with good ones. Sometimes simply avoiding a bad habit isn't enough. We feel a void that we rush to fill – sometimes with a different bad habit.

Instead of trying to not give in to sugar cravings, what if you made a specific plan to do something else?

Habits are tricky because we do them without thinking. Something triggers a craving, and the next thing you know, you find yourself giving in. By the time you realize what you've done, it's already too late.

Imagine a simple, positive action you could take whenever you felt a craving. You could do 10 pushups or squats, eat a piece of fruit, or just walk away from your desk.



One study found that obese people who took a brisk 15-minute walk significantly reduced their sugar cravings compared to those who were sedentary. All it took was a simple distraction to interrupt the deeply-ingrained pattern with healthier results.

A couple of tips to stick to your positive habit. First, make it incredibly simple. Pick one step you can take instead of a complicated series of actions. Second, write your new plan down. Research has found that it's easier to adopt a healthy diet this way.

3. Eat More Often to Keep Your Blood Sugar Stable

Some of the worst sugar cravings come after long periods of not eating. Our hunger, lack of sleep, and stress converge and create the perfect storm. The kind where you find yourself at the vending machine, surrounded by candy bar wrappers and wondering what happened.

A lot of people skip breakfast, but by 9 or 10 in the morning they're munching on something sweet to hold them over before lunch. The window between 2 or

4 pm can also be tricky because we start feeling bored and ready to go home.

The simple solution?

Eat more often. There's no need to have full-blown meals. But if you feel your blood sugar getting low (most of us feel sluggish and cranky), you've already waited too long. If you can stabilize your blood sugar before you get to that point, you'll have a much easier time managing your cravings.

Focus on foods high in protein and fiber. Research published in the journal *Trends in Food Science & Technology* found those keep you feeling fuller longer than sugary carbs, which are high in calories but only have a "very weak effect on satiety."

4. Change Your Environment

We are creatures of our environment. If we're binging on sugar every day, there are probably plenty of things around us that make it easy to happen.

Let's assume two people have the same amount of discipline. Say they even work in the same office. One of them has nothing but healthy snacks in her desk drawer. The other has his desk packed with candy and change for the vending machine. Who has an easier time resisting cravings?

The first coworker, of course. It sounds silly that those who struggle with sugar cravings would put themselves into those situations. But it happens all the time.

Changes to our environment can make a significant impact on our health. Research published in the journal *Society for Personality and Social Psychology* found this works because it removes old cues that trigger cravings.

Instead of relying on willpower to resist cravings day after day, exercise your willpower once to change your environment. Consider how you can: 1) create small obstacles between yourself and sugary treats, and 2) make it easier to eat healthily. Even subtle changes add up.

Some parts of your environment are beyond your control (there might be a vending machine at work, for instance). But it's incredible just how much

control we do have. You could stop bringing change to buy snacks. Or pack some healthy options instead. Every little thing that stacks the odds in your favor helps.

5. Consume More Probiotic Foods and Drinks

Piles of emerging research are revealing just how important the health of our gut bacteria is. An unhealthy gut has already been linked to everything from weight gain and digestive problems, to anxiety and even depression. The gut-brain connection is so profound, it's led some scientists to call the gut our "second brain" for its wide-ranging effects.

Your gut bacteria may also affect food cravings. One study found that mice with unhealthy gut bacteria had more sweet taste receptors and a stronger preference for sweets than healthy mice.

It's key to stay mindful of the conditions needed for our gut microbiome to thrive. Consuming probiotics (the "good" gut bacteria) daily is one of the easiest ways to improve gut health.

Here is a list of probiotic foods and drinks to try:

- Dark chocolate
- Fermented dairy (kefir, Greek yogurt)
- Fermented vegetables (sauerkraut, kimchi, pickles)
- Kombucha
- Olives cured in brine

These probiotics will help ensure you get enough good gut bacteria to reduce cravings and bring your system into balance. If you don't like these foods and drinks, consider taking probiotic supplements.

6. Give Meditation a Try

Cravings can be tricky to change because of just how unconscious they are. We act on autopilot. Once the damage is done, we promise ourselves we'll do better next time.

But what if we could create some space between whatever triggers the craving and us giving in? We could use that time to think things through - and reject it before it undermines our health.



Meditation can help. Research published in the journal *Appetite* found that people who meditated for just two weeks reported less intense chocolate cravings. Disidentification - the feeling of separation between one's thoughts and one's identity - proved to be the most important skill.

Don't know how to meditate? Just sit somewhere quiet, relax, and focus on your breathing for 5 to 10 minutes. Don't beat yourself up when you find your thoughts drifting (they will). Simply notice them and return your focus to your breath until your time is up.

7. Make Sure You're Getting Enough Sleep and Managing Stress

Sugar cravings don't come from just hunger alone. That can be a factor, but they can also come from a lack of sleep or stress. Sometimes all of the above.

Our bodies know, on a subconscious level, that eating sugary treats releases chemicals like dopamine and endorphins that help us feel good – at least for the moment. So we find ourselves turning to it for a quick fix whenever we're feeling tired or overwhelmed.

Getting enough sleep is essential. University of California, Berkeley researchers found that just one sleepless night decreased the ability to resist junk foods. MRI scans revealed increased activity in the reward centers of the brain, making sugary treats even more desirable.

Being proactive about managing your stress is also important. Chronic stress increases the hormone cortisol, which has been linked to craving unhealthy foods and poorer impulse control.

Even if you don't feel stressed, it could be that you've been stressed so long you just think it's normal. That's why it's crucial to set aside a few minutes a day to do something that relaxes you.

You could choose things like:

- Drawing
- Listening to music
- Painting
- Praying or simply expressing gratitude
- Reading
- Walking
- Writing
- Yoga

What you choose isn't important. What matters is consistency. Find something you enjoy, and you're more likely to make it a routine.

Focus on Gradual Improvements

Multiple factors (diet, environment, lifestyle etc.) come together to trigger sugar cravings.

It might take some time to sort out, especially if you're eating a lot of sugar

right now. But don't give up! With the steps above and a practical plan, you can make steady progress and find a solution that works for you.

Try It Yourself

You can't just ignore sugar cravings and hope they'll go away. Nor can you rely on willpower alone. Some days, you'll simply be too overwhelmed to resist the temptation.

The key is to set yourself up for success. Get a plan in place while you aren't craving sugar, put more obstacles between you and sweet treats, and pick up a few healthy habits instead. That way when the cravings come, you'll be ready to beat them.

Do you struggle with sugar cravings? What are some of your cool tricks on how to beat them? Leave a comment below and let us know!