

# Chocolate Cravings

***“I can’t live without chocolate!” I hear you say. Well, you don’t have to give it up to enjoy a healthy diet. Here are some facts and simple tips to help you beat those chocolate cravings.***

## **Chocolate and energy**

Chocolate is a high-energy food and has been used in army ration packs to fuel soldiers in the field. One hundred grams (100g) of milk chocolate packs around 2200kJ (540Cal) with 31g fat and 58g sugar.

There’s only a small difference in the energy composition between milk, dark and white chocolate. Swapping chocolate for carob bars will cut sugar, but not fat, only saving you about 184kJ (20Cal) per 100g. This may not be worth the compromise in taste.



If you are not on manoeuvres or burning this energy off with exercise, limiting chocolate, carob and other high-energy foods will help you stay in shape.

## **Chocolate and cravings**

Chocolate has some addictive properties. It contains theobromine, anandamide and other substances that may act on the brain and could cause some people to feel calm. It has even been suggested that chocolate shares similar addictive chemical properties to cannabis. The link here is weak though, with researchers stating that you’d have to eat enormous quantities to feel any affects. In the case of consuming anandamide, several kilos of chocolate.

You may inherit a sweet tooth from your parents, and naturally turn to chocolate due to its high sugar content. Chocolate desires may also have cultural influences. One study of Spanish and American men and women revealed the frequency of chocolate craving was more than twice as high in American women as in American men. There was no gender difference in the Spanish subjects.

Chemicals, culture and genetics aside, remember that chocolate just tastes good and that the pleasure of eating it is addictive. The melting point of cocoa butter is just below the human body temperature, which is why it literally melts in your mouth. This is what makes chocolate unique.

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Even though 'chocoholics' can reinforce this pleasure pattern over years, the habit can be broken. One clever study demonstrated that if you only eat chocolate after a meal as a small treat, rather than when you are hungry or crave it, you can reduce your cravings over time. This shows with a little effort you can reprogramme your eating behaviour.

## The bottom line

A little chocolate each day (a few pieces rather than a few bars) can be part of a healthful eating and exercise routine. When chocolate cravings get in the way of achieving a healthy diet, it's emotional rather than biological triggers, which are likely to need attention. Keeping an Eating Diary to become more aware of your eating triggers is a good place to start beating chocolate cravings.

## Tips to beat chocolate cravings

- Only eat in small amounts after a meal.
- Choose the best quality.
- Get your chocolate fix, with fewer calories. Try a diet hot-chocolate drink or a small tub of low-fat chocolate mouse.
- Don't buy chocolate as often and don't keep it in the house. This at least eliminates the trigger to eat it because its there.
- When you buy chocolate, choose small serves like individually wrapped bit-sized bars, a Freddo Frog or Milky Way.
- Eat chocolate slowly and savour every bite. You may feel satisfied before you consume too much.

*Researchers have discovered that chocolate produces some of the same reactions in the brain as marijuana... The researchers also discovered other similarities between the two, but can't remember what they are.*

**Matt Lauer, on NBC's "Today" show, August 22, 1996**