

# Cravings in Context:

*Listening to your body without guilt*

## Objectives

- Understand what cravings are and why they occur
- Identify common triggers for cravings
- Learn practical, non-restrictive strategies for managing cravings



## WHAT ARE CRAVINGS?

- **Cravings:** an intense desire for foods, substances, or activities
  - Not the same as hunger - often unrelated to physical hunger which is a general need for energy and nutrients
- Cravings are a type of emotional hunger and can be influenced by factors like hormones and the environment



### Hunger

- Felt in your stomach
- Comes on gradually
- Can be satisfied by any food
- Stop when you're full
- Is a joyful eating experience
- Doesn't make you feel bad after

VS.

### Craving

- Felt in your head
- Hits suddenly and feels urgent
- Crave specific items
- Doesn't stop when you're full
- Mindless and frantic eating
- Often followed by feelings of regret, guilt, and shame

## Why Do We Have Cravings?

- **Physical needs:** nutrient deficiencies (iron and magnesium) can lead to cravings for specific foods
- **Emotional states:** stress, anxiety, or depression can trigger cravings for comfort foods or substances
- **Learned associations:** habits, such as eating a specific food while watching a particular TV show, can create cravings
- **Hormonal changes:** fluctuations in hormones during pregnancy, menstruation, or menopause can affect cravings
- **Environmental triggers:** seeing, smelling, or hearing about a desired food can trigger cravings

## COMMON TRIGGERS:

- Stress or fatigue → craving sugar or caffeine
  - Both substances provide a temporary boost for energy levels and reduce the feelings of stress
  - Drawbacks: energy crashes, heightened anxiety, disrupted sleep
- Skipping meals → craving quick energy foods
  - Sugary foods or refined carbs because body is looking for something to compensate low blood sugar levels
- Restriction → craving forbidden foods more
  - Selective food deprivation often increases food cravings, especially of the one's you are restricting



# Strategies for Managing Cravings

- **Normalize cravings** – your body is trying to tell you something
- **Treat all foods equally:**
  - Food neutrality is a way to remove moral judgement from how we talk and think about food. It is the concept of viewing all foods equally, without assigning values such as “good” and “bad”
- **Identifying the underlying causes:**
  - Understanding why you’re craving a specific food can help you address the root issue
- **Distraction:**
  - Engaging in other activities can help break the craving cycle
  - Taking a walk, reading, or engaging in a hobby
- **Nutrient Dense Alternatives:**
  - Choosing more nutritious options to satisfy cravings can be a good strategy. Remember it is okay to still eat that food!
- **Eat balanced meals** with protein, fiber, and healthy fats:
  - Ensuring adequate nutrition can help reduce cravings for specific foods
  - Prioritize whole, nutrient-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and lean protein sources
- **Build in satisfaction** – allow space or “fun/play” foods if that’s what you really desire
- **Stress management:**
  - Finding healthy ways to cope with stress and anxiety can help reduce emotional cravings
- **Practice mindfulness** – slow down and check in
- **Encourage “permission with intention”** – allowing treats without guilt

## CRAVING REFLECTION TOOL:

- What am I craving?  
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- What am I feeling?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- When was my last meal?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Is there a pattern  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What would satisfy me emotionally/physically?  
\_\_\_\_\_



### REDEFINING CRAVINGS

- Cravings are not a signal to fear or fight
- Respond to your body’s cues with curiosity, compassion, and balance
- Satisfaction and nourishment can coexist in your eating habits
- The goal isn’t to eliminate cravings, but to understand and respond to them mindfully

