

# Brisk walk could help chocoholics stop snacking

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Researchers at the University of Exeter have found that a walk of just fifteen minutes can reduce chocolate cravings. The benefits of exercise in helping people manage dependencies on nicotine and other drugs have previously been recognised. Now, for the first time, newly-published research shows that the same may be true for food cravings.

Following three days of abstinence, 25 regular chocolate eaters were asked to either complete a 15-minute brisk walk or rest, in a random order. They then engaged in tasks that would normally induce chocolate cravings, including a mental challenge and opening a chocolate bar.

After exercise participants reported lower cravings than after rest. Cravings were not only reduced during the walk, but for at least ten minutes afterwards. The exercise also limited increases in cravings in

response to the two tasks.

Professor Adrian Taylor comments: "Our ongoing work consistently shows that brief bouts of physical activity reduce cigarette cravings, but this is the first study to link exercise to reduced chocolate cravings. Neuroscientists have suggested common processes in the reward centres of the brain between drug and food addictions, and it may be that exercise effects brain chemicals that help to regulate mood and cravings. This could be good news for people who struggle to manage their cravings for sugary snacks and want to lose weight."

Previous research has suggested that 97% of women and 68% of men experience food cravings. Craved foods tend to be calorie-dense, fatty or sugary foods, with chocolate being the most commonly reported. Chocolate has a number of biologically active constituents that temporarily enhance our mood with a result that eating it can become a habit, particularly when we are under stress and when it is readily available, and perhaps when we are least active.

Professor Taylor concludes: "While enjoying the occasional chocolate bar is fine, in time, regular eating may lead to stronger cravings during stress and when it is readily available. Recognising what causes us to eat high energy snacks, even if we have plans to not do so, can be helpful."

"Short bouts of physical activity can help to regulate how energised and pleasant we feel, and with a sedentary lifestyle we may naturally turn to mood regulating behaviours such as eating chocolate. Accumulating 30 minutes of daily physical activity, with two 15 minute brisk walks, for example, not only provides general physical and mental health benefits but also may help to regulate our energy intake. This research furthers our understanding of the complex physical, psychological and emotional relationship we have with food."

The research is now published online in the journal *Appetite*.

Source: University of Exeter

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