

# Clinical trial teaches binge eaters to toss away cravings

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Of 190 million obese Americans, approximately 10-15 percent engage in harmful binge eating. During single sittings, these over-eaters consume large servings of high-caloric foods. Sufferers contend with weight gain and depression including heart disease and diabetes. A new clinical trial, called Regulation of Food Cues, at UC San Diego Health System, aims to treat binge eating by helping participants to identify real hunger and to practice resistance if the stomach is full.

“Most weight-loss treatments for obese adults focus very little on the reduction of binge eating,” said Kerri Boutelle, PhD, principal investigator and associate professor in the department of psychiatry at UC San Diego School of Medicine. “With this study we use a variety of techniques to train the brain to identify and respond to hunger and cravings and to learn resistance to highly craved foods.”

The one-year study will recruit 30 participants who will undergo weekly 60–90 minute sessions held over 12 weeks. Participants will learn how food cravings originate, how to detect and monitor true hunger, how emotional factors influence eating habits, and how to manage cravings and impulses to eat.

“Binge eaters often consume food in response to their environment, even when they are not hungry. This could be a response to watching TV, long commutes, sitting on the couch, time of day, even loneliness,” said Boutelle, who is also a licensed clinical psychologist. “The goal is to reduce cravings to overeat by up to 50 percent.”

Teaching obese people to recognize hunger signals is based upon the principles of behavioral psychology, which has proven effective in treating conditions such as anxiety and bulimia. Boutelle and her team have developed a treatment model that shows that binge eating often results from response to environmental food cues. Exposure-based treatments help eaters improve their sensitivity to hunger and fullness and reduce their sensitivity to the sight and smell of food.

Similar programs aimed at overweight youths have yielded promising results and an ability to maintain reductions in binge eating at six and 12 months after treatment.

Participants who join the study will be asked to complete interviews and surveys before and after treatment groups. In addition, they will complete food logs in which they will be asked to monitor levels of [hunger](#) and fullness as well as cravings.

**More information:** To learn more about this clinical trial, please call 858-405-0263.

Provided by University of California - San Diego

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