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HEALTH FOR WOMEN



Must have chocolate! Managing those monthly food cravings

You're sat watching your favourite TV show. Suddenly, it happens. You must have a chocolate bar! Or maybe a bag of crisps. You can't resist. But one isn't enough. You know it's wrong, but you can't stop yourself. And then you realise it's that time of the month... and the craving is back!

Whilst it's great to be a woman, there can sometimes be a price to pay. Even if you're fortunate enough not to suffer from bad PMS, you could find yourself giving into your food cravings too often - and start piling on the pounds.

So what to do? The first important step towards beating your monthly food madness is to understand why it happens.

It's all in the mind

One reason is that, because you may have other problems, such as pain, bloating or fatigue, your mind may believe a little pleasure is deserved. Chocolate craving is probably explained by phenylethylamine, an ingredient that has a similar affect to dopamine, the brain hormone that makes you feel happy.

Unfortunately, overindulging in any unhealthy foods can be counter-productive. If you put on weight you may be left feeling miserable all the time!

Controlling your cravings

Plan ahead. If you keep a diary of the time and day of your cycle when your cravings are at their worst, you may well detect a pattern. You could then predict when you'll be most at the mercy of your cravings and be prepared.

One obvious solution is to make sure those bad snacks aren't in the house. If they're not there, you can't eat them! Failing that, only buy small quantities, rather than big packs and large tubs of ice cream.

Eat more regularly. If you have small meal every 4 hours or so, then you'll feel less hungry as the day progresses.

It's what you eat that counts

Try stocking up with fresh fruit, salad vegetables and low fat yoghurts, so that you have something to hand that's low in calories and fat and, in many cases, actually good for you.

Instead of a sandwich, try a slice of meat or a piece of cheese on its own to satisfy your craving for something savoury. If you can, avoid salty foods as they make you feel thirsty but may also enhance fluid retention.

Enjoy a well-balanced diet. Premenstrual, you will actually consume more calories than usual, so make sure they're good calories, such as fruit rather than sweets and cakes.

Try to keep busy. When your mind isn't occupied, it will start thinking about food! Gentle exercise, walking, gardening, reading, even cleaning the house, all offer distractions that can help tame your cravings.

Reward yourself. Reserve a small treat for yourself and indulge guilt-free, but always keep it small.

You can't avoid PMS, but if you know why and when you get your sudden cravings, then you can regain control and feel healthier and happier throughout your cycle.