

# What These 6 Common Food Cravings Are Trying to Tell You

by SHOLEEN LAGADIEN May 14, 2018

From chocolate cupcakes to a big ol' steak, not all cravings are created equal. While some are purely about pleasure (like your [favorite comfort foods](#)), others can point to a lack of nutrients or a hormonal imbalance. If you've ruled out stress or [other emotional reasons](#) you're craving unhealthy foods, there might be a physiological reason your body is trying to get you to eat potato chips or pasta carbonara.

And while we're all for giving in to temptation every once in a while, if you're looking to maintain a balanced and healthy diet, there might be some swaps you can make. Read on to find out what your cravings mean and how you can honor them in a way that's good for your body.

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## 1 Craving Chocolate? You May Need Magnesium

While it's true that sometimes our bodies use food cravings to tell us we're lacking something, when you crave chocolate, chocolate usually isn't what your body needs. Rather, when a chocolate craving strikes, it's more likely you're deficient in magnesium, chromium and vitamin B, New York-based board-certified traditional naturopath Sally Warren, Ph.D.

Give your body these micronutrients in supplement form, or eat 70 percent (or higher) dark chocolate if you really can't resist as it's a natural source of magnesium, she says. "A handful of raw almonds can also help relieve this craving, since these are high in magnesium."

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## 2 Craving Sugary Foods? You May Need Water

A craving for sugary foods like soda or cake can be indicative of either low blood sugar or dehydration. However, reaching for another scoop of ice cream is bound to set you up for a sugar crash, which can wreak havoc on your hormones and metabolism, says naturopath Dr. Sally Warren.

Before reaching for the sweets, drink a glass of water and give your system a moment to reboot, suggests Warren. If the craving persists, eat an apple, some berries or an orange. However, craving sugar could also indicate depression, says Illinois-based naturopath Megan Heimer. If you're feeling down, find healthy ways to boost your serotonin through exercise or talking to a therapist.

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### 3 Craving Salty Foods? You May Need B Vitamins

A salt craving can be caused by several things, such as excessive sugar in the diet, a deficiency in sodium or too much potassium, says naturopath Megan Heimer. She recommends cutting down on sugar and avoiding table salt. “Opt for Himalayan or celery juice to remineralize the body.”

If your craving for salt is coming during a stressful period, it might also indicate a need for B vitamins. Taking a good vitamin B complex will quell the craving. “However, if the salt craving is following a sweaty workout or an illness or upset stomach,” says naturopath Dr. Sally Warren, “Pedialyte or a similar electrolyte powder is better than plain water to replace the missing minerals.” Best to choose these rather than sports drinks, which often contain too much sugar.

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## 4 Craving Fried Foods? You May Need Essential Fatty Acids

When it comes to craving greasy or fried food, a deficiency in EFAs (essential fatty acids) is usually the culprit, says naturopath Dr. Sally Warren. The burger or bacon-and-eggs breakfast, however, contain too many trans fats — fats that are processed to lengthen shelf life and make a cheaper product.

Instead of the greasy pizza or fried chicken, have an avocado, a spoonful of coconut or flaxseed oil, a salad with olive oil and balsamic vinegar or dip bread into olive oil. Nuts and seeds contain healthy oils and are excellent choices as well. Alternatively, regularly include oily fish like salmon or herring in your diet or take a fish-oil supplement. “Remember, your brain is 60 percent fat, and your body needs oils — and the right kind — to stay healthy,” Dr. Warren says.

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## 5 Craving Bread or Pasta? You May Need Nitrogen

Bread and pasta are “comfort foods that seem to be like ‘crack’ is to the brain of addicts,” says naturopath Dr. Sally Warren. When you’re eating that croissant, the neurotransmitter dopamine (also known as the “pleasure chemical”) is released, explaining why you may have a hard time quitting carbs.

Carbohydrate cravings could mean that your body wants more nitrogen (meat, chicken and fish contain this). “Or it could need a food ‘hug’ and instant gratification,” Dr. Warren says. Snack on a handful of nuts or a helping of hummus. If this fails to extinguish your hankering, then it’s likely a gratification craving. An emotional commitment (journaling, chatting with a friend, etc.) and positive self-talk about what is really needed may be the answer here, says Dr. Warren.

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## 6 Craving Red Meat? You May Need Iron

A craving for red meat often points to a deficiency in protein (which is quite rare in the United States) as well as iron, amino acids or phosphorus, says naturopath Megan Heimer. Dr. Warren agrees that an iron deficiency is usually responsible for the red-meat craving, but cautions against eating too much meat to make up for this.

“People really do not need as much protein as the popular press seems to try to convince us. There are cheap, nonmeat solutions that are friendlier to the planet and keep the body healthy, happy and well-fed, without cravings and deficiencies.” She suggests you eat dried fruits, beets, beans and prunes if you’re iron-deficient. These are all packed with adequate iron and are also easier on the kidneys and your digestion.