

BEAT *BINGE EATING*

Step away from the doughnuts! If you're guilty of undoing healthy eating habits with a spontaneous food binge, read our ultimate guide to bypass overeating

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We've all done it: followed a healthy diet all day only to munch through a whole packet of Bourbons after a bad afternoon at work, or been disciplined about what we eat throughout the week only to have a carte-blanche selection of food at Saturday's barbecue.

Occasional binge eating – be it a stress-induced feast or mindless munching – happens to the best of us. “Many of us reach for particular foods during emotional periods – it soothes frazzled emotions and is a great comforter,” explains Claudia Norris, nutritionist at happyinbody.com, “but the key to stopping binge eating is to understand why it is happening in the first place.” With data showing that there's roughly a one in 30 chance of someone developing a binge eating disorder (BED; a medical condition in which people binge eat regularly and excessively), it's palpable that overeating can be a serious condition. But, if you're simply guilty of letting your healthy eating guard down every now and again, follow these easy strategies to stop binge eating in its tracks.



The Situation: YOU'RE BORED AT WORK

Ever asked yourself why you gobbled a whole bag of cashews while trawling through emails? Science may have the answer. According to new research published in the journal *Nutrition & Diabetes*, the more we eat, the more we want to eat. Scientists claim that excessive calories can block a pathway that promotes the feeling of fullness, which could explain why it's so easy to overeat when you're not even feeling hungry.

The Solution: LEARN TO EAT MINDFULLY

Experts note that it can take the brain 20 minutes to register that the stomach is full, so pay attention. "Consider the texture, taste, colours and flavours of each mouthful and you'll feel more satisfied," says Lily Soutter, nutritionist and weight loss expert (lilysoutternutrition.com). "Mindful eating also helps distinguish between emotional and physical hunger. The increased awareness of food-related triggers will help you to be control and develop a healthy response to them."

The Situation: YOU'VE GOT A BIG DEADLINE

If you want to curl up on the sofa and eat ice-cream after a stressful day at work, you're not alone. According to experts, binge eating is a common way of trying to deal with negative emotions, such as stress, anxiety and depression. "Having a tummy full of food draws blood away from the brain to the stomach," explains Norris. "Many people subconsciously overeat to achieve this 'zoned-out' state of mind and escape stress."

The Solution: HIT THE GYM FLOOR

Scientists from the University of Alabama in the US recently discovered that exercising after a stressful event, such as an exam or deadline, may make us less likely to overeat. Lead researcher William Neumeier said to *Times* magazine: "Exercise has the ability to increase available fuel sources in the body that may signal to the brain: 'Here is the energy source I need; I don't need to replenish it through food.'"

The Situation: YOU'RE A WEEKEND BINGER

Happy hour on Friday, pizza night on Saturday, brunch on Sunday – if you relax your diet at the weekend, you may be rewarding yourself with food. Experts argue that this is because the brain releases the happy hormone dopamine when you eat fat or sugar, making you feel good.

The Solution: PACK IN SOME PROTEIN

Break the emotional eating cycle by increasing your intake of protein. Protein will keep you fuller for longer, decreasing the chances of overeating throughout the day. "Research is beginning to show that protein has a value in keeping people satiated," explains Laura Clark, registered dietitian for Yokebe Active Food. "A typical diet may be low in protein at breakfast, contain mediocre levels at lunch and be high in protein at dinner – not ideal. Instead, space protein consumption out across the day and increase it to 30 per cent of your daily calories, particularly if you struggle to feel full."

The Situation: YOU'RE FAMISHED AFTER EXERCISE

Always hungry after a workout? Even if you've sweated away hundreds of calories, it's easy to pile it all back on by stuffing yourself with food when you get home from the gym. In fact, research shows that exercisers tend to eat larger portions and richer food after a workout than at other times. Oops!

The Solution: MONITOR THE BITES

Study after study shows that it is surprisingly common for those who exercise to eat more than they've expended, and pile on weight. Scientists report that the body likes to stay at the weight it's used to, so appetite hormones such as ghrelin, can increase after activity – especially among women. "Choose a smaller plate," suggests Soutter. "Optical illusion can make us eat more than we think. Larger plates can make a serving of food appear smaller, however, smaller plates can lead us to misjudge the same quantity of food to be significantly larger."

The Situation: YOU'RE HAVING A 3PM SLUMP

Afternoons are a tough time in the office. But if you're guilty of reaching for the biscuit tin at around 3pm each day, you could be suffering from the 'mid-afternoon slump' in which blood sugar levels and, subsequently, motivation take a nose dive.

The Solution: CONTROL YOUR CRAVINGS

Cravings are often a sign of an imbalance in the body. "If you are craving sugar, look for patterns," recommends Norris. "If your danger time is around 3pm, experiment with having more for breakfast and lunch. Notice, for example, if having pasta at lunch is going to trigger a larger craving. Upping your protein and good fats at lunch may help stave off sugar cravings in the afternoon." Try a chicken and avocado salad. Yum!

3 WAYS TO STOP SNACKING

According to new research from protein shake Yokebe, one in three dieters attribute not feeling hungry to weight loss success. Follow these tips from dietitian, Laura Clark, to feel fuller for longer.

#1 EAT OFTEN

Without the right balance of foods, cravings are all too common. Think about your mealtime routine and eat regularly, leaving no more than three to four hours between meals. This will help you to work out why you're feeling that craving.

#2 EAT VARIETY

Balance your plate. Combine small portions of wholegrain carbohydrate with some lean protein and plenty of fibre (from vegetables or salad) to regulate your blood sugar levels. It is likely to be the peaks and troughs of blood sugar levels that will make you crave sweet things.

#3 EAT PROTEIN

Protein isn't just for gym bunnies – if used correctly, it can support slimming down. Protein will keep you feeling fuller for longer, so could help to reduce portion sizes and quash those snack cravings. It also helps your body maintain muscle mass, which supports your metabolic rate. Consume it regularly throughout the day.

HEALTHY FOOD SWAPS

Still got food cravings? If you really must indulge, reach for one of these...

SWAP Crisps

FOR Watermelon seeds
Watermelon seeds are a great low-calorie source of filling protein and fibre. Mello Watermelon Seeds pack 34.1g protein per pot. (£2.99; Planet Organic)

SWAP A chocolate bar

FOR An apple
One Pink Lady apple contains just 10g sugar, which would save you around 20g compared to a shop bought smoothie.

SWAP Ice-cream

FOR Frozen yoghurt
Lower in sugar and calories, frozen yoghurt is a better choice. Claudi & Fin Frozen Yoghurt Lollies have just 35 calories (£2.99; Tesco's)

