

POUND WISE

A HEALTHY APPETITE: WHY, OH WHY,

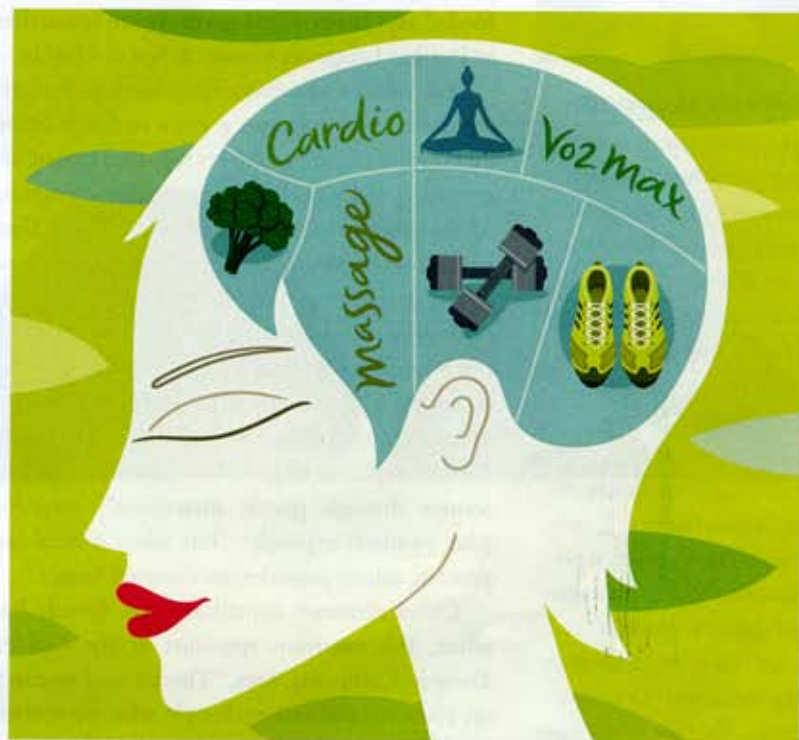
DO I WANT TO EAT MORE THAN I NEED TO? BY SUSAN CRANDELL

MY HIKING BUDDY CHRISTINE coined a phrase to describe our bouts of overeating: tape-worm days. We'll dine sensibly for weeks, then hit a day when we want to consume everything in the refrigerator but the lightbulb. Neither of us can pinpoint a cause—it occurs whether or not we've exercised and has little to do with hunger—but the effects can be lasting. Once I'm off the wagon, it's hard to climb back on. That's why I decided to ask some top spa nutritionists to explain what happens when we're tempted to overeat—and to suggest ways to quash those cravings.

HUNGER VERSUS APPETITE

There's a big difference between the two. Hunger is biological; appetite is behavioral. "Most of us don't eat based on physiology," says Lisa Young, who teaches nutrition at New York University. "Thin people do. But the rest of us eat what's in front of us, what we smell, what we see." The appetite trap—I'm not hungry, I just think I am—is hard to avoid because appetite mimics hunger. "Appetite can cause a physical sensation," says Hana Feeney, a nutritionist at Canyon Ranch in Tucson. "When you see a food that looks good, the brain releases peptides and the hormones that stimulate hunger."

Now you just have to add some emotion—stress, depression, even boredom—to bring on the tapeworm. "No question, we're geared to the emotional aspects of food—food as a tranquilizer, satiating anxiety by eating," says Gordon Reynolds, M.D., the medical director of Green Valley Spa in Utah. "When we're upset, we tend to go for sugar, a quick fix. As soon as blood sugar goes up, it stimulates insulin production. That drives blood sugar down, and the brain, which needs sugar, sends out a command for more. Shortly after eating sugar, we just want more."



Once again, psychology becomes biology: We eat for emotional reasons, and then our body tells us we need to eat more.

Young's book, *The Portion Teller Plan*, sees mindless eating from another angle: We're victims of supersizing. I'm amazed when she lays out the change in portion size since the 1960s, when the average American adult weighed 25 pounds less. Bagels have doubled in size; muffins have tripled. A typical serving of pasta at a restaurant is now three cups, not one and a half. "Portions are two to five times bigger than in the 1970s," Young says. "Study after study shows that we eat more when presented with more food, even if we don't like it."

A NEW APPROACH

Forget dieting and deprivation. The new idea in nutrition circles is satiety. It means eating foods that increase feelings of fullness, if not always sat-

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PROGRESS REPORT:
I'm holding steady at 133

isfaction. These foods tend to be good for you and don't contain a lot of calories. Green vegetables are a prime example. Their opposite is calorie-dense foods (you know which ones they are), which beget appetite. "The good news is that you only need portion control for calorie-dense foods," says James Kenney, a nutrition researcher at Pritikin Longevity Center & Spa in Florida.

Australian researchers have developed a satiety index, which assigns a score to foods based

heart rates—just as you would when exercising. This led researchers to conclude that resisting temptation gives your body a workout. As Suzanne Segerstrom, one of the study's authors, told Reuters, willpower "is like a muscle. The more you work it, the stronger it gets."

Keeping active also helps curb appetite. Have you ever noticed how you get hungry when bored but go for hours without thinking of food when absorbed in something? Thank evolution for

LUXURY SPA FINDER

director of behavioral health at Canyon Ranch in Tucson, recently gave me some perspective. "You overeat when you become mindless," she says. "Food blocks emotion like anesthesia blocks sensation. You have to talk yourself through it. Say, 'This is my most adored food. I can eat one piece now, another tomorrow.'" My takeaway: You can create willpower,

sooner through gastric distension"—meaning your stomach expands—"but when a meal has protein, satiety peptides are elevated longer."

Other elements contribute, too. Wendy Bazilian, the nutrition specialist at the Golden Door in California, says, "There's cool research on chewing and satiety. People who chew their food longer tend to be more satisfied. It may relate to the stomach sending a signal to the brain that we're satiated, or it may have to do with gastric secretions." There's also a psychological component to chewing. "We have 30 feet of gut but only ten cubic inches in our mouth and nose for a sensory experience with food. The more time in the mouth, the greater the psychological satisfaction."

The good news is that moderate eating gets easier the more you do it; we can condition ourselves to be satisfied with less food. "You can blunt cravings, reset your satiety. It takes a month," Young says. A recent study at the University of Kentucky adds another wrinkle, suggesting that you can increase your willpower through exercising it. Subjects were presented with carrots, cookies, and candy. Compared to the cookie and candy eaters, those who were instructed to eat only carrots had slightly elevated

A GAME PLAN

"Eat only when you're hungry, and stop before you're full." We've all heard that advice—and we all know it's easier said than done. So here are some practical tips that can take you through the holiday season.

Choose whole foods. Nutrition is the key to weight management. "People are always surprised that they're not hungry on the 1,500-calories-a-day Green Valley diet, even though they're used to eating twice that many calories," says Dr. Reynolds. "It's because the diet is nutritionally balanced. Appetite is stimulated by eating the wrong things—processed and refined foods, which change our insulin-sugar relationship. The key to weight loss is eating only whole foods. If you do that, you're not going to have cravings. Body wisdom takes over."

Start a meal with salad or soup. This is a favorite spa trick. It works because low-calorie, high-volume foods distend your stomach, triggering satiety hormones.

Eat slowly and often. "CCK, a satiety peptide, peaks 30 minutes after eating. If you finish a meal in ten minutes, you won't feel satiated," Feeney says. Frequent small meals also minimize food-as-reward thinking. "If you go a long time

long time between meals, your hunger peptides climb and climb. When you finally eat, it stimulates the reward area of the brain. The body begins to associate a big reward with eating. Smaller, more frequent meals minimize that chemical reward mechanism."

Observe the 15-minute rule. If you want seconds, wait 15 minutes, says Bazilian. "That's how long it takes for satiety signals to reach the brain, bringing your craving into check."

Keep a "cheats diary." It's a classic trick, but Young suggests a twist: Instead of writing down every morsel you eat, which gets dreary and cumbersome, just jot down the contraband. "People think they're good, but all the nibbling, finishing the kids' food, adds up."

Don't deny your craving. "It's your downfall, so learn to allow yourself that treat," Young says. "If you want a piece of chocolate, have it. One piece, not six."

Lead yourself not into temptation. By limiting the number of calorie-dense foods you keep on hand. "Studies show that the more variety, the more people eat," says Young. "With fruits and vegetables, the more variety, the healthier. With sugary cereals, the more variety, the more calories. So buy only one kind."

It's okay to feel hungry. "You don't have to respond to every signal," Bazilian says. "You're not a car that's going to run out of gas. Try getting on a schedule. Ask yourself, 'Is it time to eat or not?'"

Practice portion control. But remember, that doesn't mean small portions of everything. "You can eat big portions of fruits and vegetables," says Young. "Nobody gets fat eating carrots and bananas."

As for tapeworm days, I've learned they can arise because I've worked out extra hard or eaten too lightly the previous day. But far more often, it's my mind, not my body, that's leading me astray. Appetite, not hunger, is tempting me to overeat. I'm using these strategies to cope. My new mantra: Feed the body, not the head.

SUSAN CRANDELL is the author of *Thinking About Tomorrow: Reinventing Yourself at Midlife*.



My three fitness faves

CALIFORNIA:

CAL-A-VIE

VISTA Small classes, large dollops of personal attention, luxe rooms in French-country style, and a gorgeous US\$5 million fitness center make this my first choice when it comes to boutique destination spas. Instructors are first-rate, and the fitness center has a splendidly equipped weight room (with leather seats on the machines), light-drenched workout studios, and a full complement of Pilates machines. While the hiking program is limited, the morning classes—cardio kickboxing, circuit training, Pilates, yoga, and more—are kick-ass and will ratchet up your fitness program several notches in a week. And there's no hiding in the back row because the spa takes a maximum of 30 guests. If mornings are tough love, afternoons are tender, given over to spa treatments. Try the Cal-a-Vie Vichy Shower with Body Buffing, an exfoliation followed by a relaxing stint under the shower. The food is complex, highly flavored, and totally delicious. Meals are plated, ensuring that you won't overeat. 866-772-4283, www.cal-a-vie.com

UTAH:

RED MOUNTAIN SPA

ST. GEORGE Named for the crimson cliffs of Snow Canyon State Park, which abuts the property, Red Mountain, in the state's southwest corner, offers 30 hikes every week, including excursions to Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks and the Grand Canyon. Hikes are graded: Trekker I is relaxed, Trekker II is moderate, and Trekker III really moves. (Believe the website, which states, "previous endur-

ance hiking experience recommended.") There's also a full gym, though most guests think they've punched their fitness card by hiking. The Sagestone Spa (14 treatment rooms) occupies a 1950s geodesic dome with a spectacular mountain view. For full-out satisfaction and value, the Sagestone sampler combines a Swedish massage, facial, body treatment of your choice, manicure, and pedicure. One drawback: no food police. Breakfast and lunch are buffet-style, and beware the not-especially-low-cal desserts—you don't burn that many calories hiking. Beer, wine, and soda are also on offer. Often overlooked: Red Mountain's diagnostic services, which can be valuable in starting or improving a fitness regimen. 800-407-3002, www.redmountainspa.com

BRAZIL:

THE ISLAND EXPERIENCE

ILHA GRANDE This Portuguese-accented boot camp on an island 100 miles south of Rio de Janeiro takes a classic approach to weight loss but wraps it in tropical adventure. Each day opens and closes with yoga on the spacious deck. In between, guests (ten maximum) explore the island in kayaks and on foot, with guides pushing you as hard as you're willing to go. The fit test: scaling 3,200-foot Pico do Papagaio for a parrot's-eye view of the island. Meals are portion controlled (about 1,800 calories per day) and emphasize fresh produce, local fish, and tropical fruits. The rooms are basic, but the sea views are superb.

347-416-6517, www.theislandexperience.com