

ARE YOU A FOOD ADDICT? - *By Tricia Talerico, D.C., MS, Nutr.*



Recent research focuses on how our nation's epidemics of obesity, heart disease and diabetes may not be linked to any specific macronutrient (fat, protein, carb) but more to the addictive properties of many processed foods and their added flavorings. Additionally, as junk food industries increase the amounts of chemical flavorings (ie. check out the newest flavors of doritos), for many people, nutritious foods seem blander and less appealing. Michael Moss, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for The New York Times, explains this concept in his book, [SALT SUGAR FAT: How the Food Giants Hooked Us.](#) Big food industries have spent the last 100 years creating more and more calorie dense products which have contributed to the rise in obesity rates.

Food addiction or “conditioned hypereating” has caused us to spend \$375 billion on snack foods annually between 2013 and 2014. So, what is the biochemistry that links food to addiction? What makes us hide from chips or avoid the supermarket aisle with the chocolate? What happens to our brains when “palatability” and pleasure are scientifically manipulated? According to a 2001 study, palatable food stimulates the same neural systems implicated in drug addiction. In other words, sugar might have the same effects as a drug of abuse by sensitizing dopamine receptor binding and opioid receptors in the brain. Other research points to the similarity between binge eating disorder (BED) and addictive behaviors and dopamine receptor stimulation.

What else can lead to imbalanced eating patterns? Dysregulation in the hormonal regulators of hunger, satiety, adiposity (leptin, ghrelin) and insulin. In cases of severe obesity and/or food addiction, these hormonal regulators can be checked in routine bloodwork.

Evaluating and supporting intestinal microbacteria, evaluating hormonal imbalances and stress responses are all ways to diagnose and then support imbalanced eating patterns. Assessment and support of methylation pathways in the body are also crucial to correction of imbalanced eating. Methylation is a vital biochemical process that is essential for normal function of almost all of our body's systems. It helps repair our DNA, regulates homocysteine metabolism and is crucial for detoxification and keeping inflammation under control in our bodies. Genetic testing (MTHFR SNP) is a way to look at the efficiency of these methylation pathways.

Lastly and most importantly, social and emotional support systems are key to successfully taming a food addiction. Support groups like OA (overeaters anonymous), individual counseling with a qualified therapist, regular meetings with others who have similar goals and struggles are all options on your journey. However, I often find that part of the food addiction puzzle is that many are not educated about how to combine foods properly or the importance of portion

control and food timing. It's a lot to think about but there is help when you look for it.

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