

OOPS

{ YOU DID IT AGAIN. }

YOU SWORE YOU'D HAVE JUST A FEW FRIES AND YOU'D GIVE UP THOSE GIANT BREAKFAST BAGELS. YOU ALSO PROMISED (*PROMISED!*) THAT YOU'D DEAL WITH PMS IN A WAY THAT DIDN'T INVOLVE CANDY BARS. SO WHY DO YOUR CRAVINGS STILL GET THE BEST OF YOU? FORGET WILLPOWER. THE SOLUTIONS ARE ALL IN YOUR HEAD.

BY LESLIE GOLDMAN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER ARDITO

◀ **YOU THINK** After a crazy day at work I deserve a big pile of fries.

◀ **WHY YOU CAN'T RESIST** Stress intensifies cravings for comfort foods because your body wants the soothing hit of dopamine they provide. Eating something you love also happens to take your mind off what's bothering you, says Susan Albers, Psy.D., author of *50 Ways to Soothe Yourself Without Food*.

◀ **TAKE CONTROL BY** . . . jotting down your worries in a journal instead of numbing them with food. "You'll become more aware of your negative emotions so you can find ways to work through them," Dr. Albers says. Getting enough magnesium may also help halt binges since it aids in curbing the stress response, says nutritionist Elizabeth Somer, R.D., author of *Eat Your Way to Happiness*. Try whole grains, nuts and soy products.

◀ **YOU THINK** If I see chocolate I eat it. There's no stopping me!

◀ **WHY YOU CAN'T RESIST** It's not just the taste that makes chocolate so tempting—it's also the blissed-out feeling you get from eating it. When chocolate's potent blend of fat and sugar hits your bloodstream, it signals the reward center of your brain to release dopamine, a chemical that produces feelings of euphoria. The sensation is basically a mild version of the high that people get after consuming drugs or alcohol, says Joe Frascella, Ph.D., director of the Division of Clinical Neuroscience and Behavioral Research at the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

◀ **TAKE CONTROL BY** . . . walking off the urge to indulge. Researchers at Britain's University of Exeter found that taking a 15-minute stroll may help curb chocolate cravings.

◀ **YOU THINK** When I'm feeling sad, I pop doughnut holes like mints. They're the perfect pick-me-up.

◀ **WHY YOU CAN'T RESIST** Carbs stimulate production of the feel-good hormone serotonin, which dips when you're depressed. "In a sense, foods such as doughnuts or pasta act like edible tranquilizers," says Judith Wurtman, Ph.D., coauthor of *The Serotonin Power Diet*.

◀ **TAKE CONTROL BY** . . . eating carbs (seriously!). This is one craving you should satisfy because your body needs serotonin; without it you'll be stressed, tired and irritable, explains Dr. Wurtman. She recommends limiting yourself to a "therapeutic" amount of low-fat carbs when a craving kicks in. "Eating just 25 grams—about the amount in a cup of plain Cheerios or a small English muffin—can help you feel better in 20 to 30 minutes."



YOU THINK After a bad night's sleep I have to eat constantly the next day. I'm ravenous!

WHY YOU CAN'T RESIST Just a few nights of tossing and turning can send your appetite into overdrive. That's because sleep helps regulate body weight and metabolism, says Scott Isaacs, M.D., author of *The Leptin Boost Diet*. Log too few hours and levels of the hunger-regulating hormone leptin dip while the amount of ghrelin, a hormone that increases appetite, rises. And if you frequently miss out on sleep you may gain weight. A joint Stanford University and University of Wisconsin study found that people who got less than eight hours of sleep a night had a higher body mass index than those who slept more.

TAKE CONTROL BY . . . getting enough rest. But since that isn't always doable, tweak your diet to fight that ravenous feeling, says Dr. Isaacs. Eating fruit, veggies and high-fiber carbs regularly can help your body produce leptin more efficiently, while foods high in zinc, such as beef and low-fat dairy, may enhance leptin's effect.

YOU THINK When I have PMS chocolate is a need, not a want.

WHY YOU CAN'T RESIST Chocolate contains ingredients that can boost production of feel-good brain chemicals like serotonin, endorphins and phenylethylamine, a chemical the body releases when you fall in love. But another reason you're cuckoo for cocoa is because you—heck, pretty much all American women—have come to associate chocolate with that time of the month. “Women in this country think of chocolate as a taboo food,” says Debra Zellner, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Montclair State University. “And because it's hard to resist temptation when you feel lousy, you're more likely to give in and eat chocolate when PMS symptoms start.”

TAKE CONTROL BY . . . soothing premenstrual tension the healthy way through exercise, deep breathing or yoga. Once you cut stress, your candy bar cravings will be less intense. To break the chocolate-period association in your mind, Dr. Zellner recommends eating small servings of chocolate throughout the month. “If you rarely give yourself permission to eat it, you're more likely to overdo it and to binge the few times you do decide to indulge,” she says.



YOU THINK I have to get a bucket of popcorn when I see a movie.

WHY YOU CAN'T RESIST Popcorn seems like a necessity because you've been conditioned to want it whenever you catch a flick, says Dr. Albers. "When an event becomes linked in your brain to a specific food—like a movie theater and popcorn, a baseball game and a hot dog, a TV show and a bowl of ice cream—you're likely to indulge without even thinking about it," she explains. Huge serving sizes also prompt you to eat on autopilot. Cornell University research revealed that moviegoers who ate popcorn from large containers consumed 45 percent more of it than those who munched from medium-size buckets.

TAKE CONTROL BY . . . identifying the situations that trigger mindless eating (keeping a food journal can help). Once you've done that, you can come up with ways to sever the food connection or create healthier ones, says Dr. Albers. Some tips: Smuggle light microwavable popcorn into the theater when you go to the movies; TiVo *So You Think You Can Dance* and watch it on Sunday morning without your usual bowl of ice cream; swap the hot dog for a pretzel at your next ball game.

YOU THINK The only thing I ever want for breakfast is a big bagel.

WHY YOU CAN'T RESIST Blame morning food cravings on a brain chemical called neuropeptide Y, which helps govern your appetite for carb-rich foods. "Levels of NPY are high in the morning because your body wants immediate fuel after fasting for eight hours," says Somer. The problem is that while foods rich in simple carbs—such as plain bagels—are digested rapidly to deliver a blast of energy, you then have to deal with a blood-sugar crash. And what will you want to eat to make yourself feel better? You guessed it: More carbs!

TAKE CONTROL BY . . . eating a combination of complex whole-grain carbs and protein for breakfast to reduce your cravings. Both take longer to digest than simple carbs, so you'll get a steady stream of energy and feel full longer. Try a bowl of shredded wheat and blueberries with skim milk or whole-wheat toast topped with peanut butter along with a glass of orange juice, says Somer.

HUNGRY? Don't cave in to cravings! Find readers' tips for avoiding the urge to splurge at LHJ.com/cravings