

Savor Your Sweets

19 Tips to Satisfy Your Cravings ~Without Guilt

By Dr. Gretchen Kubacky, The PCOS Psychologist



Intro



If there's one thing every PCOS patient knows first-hand, it's the intense food cravings. Something spicy, something tart, something salty, something creamy, something sweet. Mostly, the things we actually want fall into the category of "junk" foods (although I hate to judge a food that way!) I prefer to think that there are no good foods and no bad foods, just wrong portions or frequency. And, for some of us, some foods are just not agreeable to our systems, whether because of allergies, sensitivities, or for some other reason. I really like the idea of moderation in all things, even - especially food. The strict restrictions lead to binging, guilt, and regret, followed by a return to restriction, lather/rinse/repeat. Not to mention, those restrictions can lead to missing out on a whole lot of life, as you say "no, thank you" to every yummy thing and eat your dietetic lunch from home.



Carbs and sweets are definitely the culprits we're talking about here (because, as one of my favorite clients once told me, "Dr. Gretchen, no one ever craves a chicken breast!") Ain't that the truth?! Carbs are everywhere. They taste good, they're cheap and easy, and they make us feel good in the moment. It's a perfect setup for the addictive cycle of craving and indulgence. You should know that the appetite for sweets and sugars of all kinds may be hardwired. From birth, sweet is the first taste humans prefer. And sweets are used to reward, to soothe, to celebrate, and so much more.

There's a lot of cultural conditioning around sweets as both necessary and appropriate foods:

- Remember being offered dessert, but only if you cleaned your plate? (Hello, invitation to overeat when you're already full!)
- Or, a cookie if you stopped crying about your skinned knee?
- How can you go to the movies without popcorn and candy?
- Birthday cake and ice cream are a given, right?
- Fancy, multi-tiered wedding cakes that you simply must eat, or risk insulting the bride.
- Fourth of July pies and cobblers.
- Popsicles and ice cream bars...all summer long.
- Homemade fudge and cookies at the holidays.
- And, let's not forget Valentine's Day, Easter, Rosh Hashanah, and all the other holidays that come with their own holiday-specific sweets.

You probably just got stimulated by reading this list - I know I did! A little ice cream sounds perfect right about now. And this is the thing - there's just so much power of suggestion! Add in the exposure to advertising, where luscious images of food are in your face every waking moment, and just the sheer preponderance of sugary stuff everywhere. No wonder it's so hard to resist or keep your mind off what to eat next.

Serotonin, the so-called "feel-good chemical" in our brain, is released when we consume carbohydrates. Carbohydrates come in many forms, such as whole grains, fruits, dairy products, and vegetables – and of course, sugar and sugar-containing sweets and treats. But again, given the choice of a piece of fruit or a cookie, many of us will opt for the most concentrated source of calories and sugar (the cookie).

The taste of sugar also releases endorphins that calm and relax us, and may give you a little happy buzz, or high, that some people describe as "addictive." That may explain why it's so hard to stop eating sweets, once you get started.

Sweets also taste good, plain and simple, and the preference for the sweet flavors gets reinforced when we reward our brains with more treats, which can lead to further cravings. It may seem like biology is destiny, and that this is an impossible problem to control, but it's not.



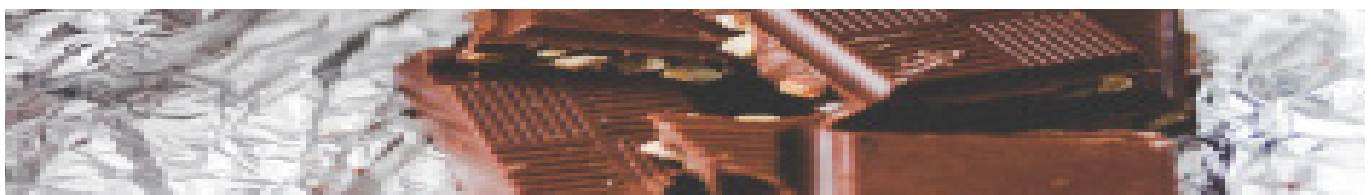
My **19** Favorite Tips for Satisfying Cravings

1. Give in a little

The key here is little! Eat a bit of what you're craving, maybe a child-sized ice cream cone, or a fun-size candy bar. Tell yourself that one is the limit, and stick to it. Actually giving yourself permission to have the thing you want is really powerful. It takes you out of victim mode, from "Poor me, I'm always on a diet, this PCOS sucks, I can never eat anything I want." to "Yes, I can eat what I want!" You just can't eat an unlimited quantity of it. Hey, life isn't perfect!

2. Dark chocolate

72% minimum cocoa content is what the experts recommend for maximum health benefits with minimum sugar. Many sources say up to one ounce per day is perfectly fine (that's about one-fourth of a European bar, or two squares). Chocolate supplies magnesium, manganese, and other trace minerals, and may actually promote heart health and improved blood pressure control. But again, quantity is key.





3. Coffee

Is it good for you or bad for you? I'm not going to take a side because before you finish reading this, the next expert will have issued a new study contradicting the last one. And some of you are going to be addicted regardless. But here's an interesting little trick picked up from some of those "naturally slim" people: After lunch or dinner, instead of ordering dessert, order coffee. Regular or decaf, whichever suits you. Add cream and sugar if desired. It's kind of a closing ritual for a meal and it's unlikely that you'll even want a dessert after that.

4. Prunes

Before you laugh and relegate this to the mental file "Constipation Cures My Grandmother Loves," hear me out. Prunes, in addition to being a great source of fiber, have a remarkably similar flavor profile to chocolate, so much so that baby food prunes are a common ingredient in brownies and other chocolate desserts when you're trying to reduce fat and sugar. The taste, blended with chocolate, is almost undetectable. Try it and see. Two or three prunes can wipe out a chocolate craving, and it's highly unlikely that you're going to go off on a prune binge!

5. Fresh fruit

Classic, boring, dietetic. Right? And really delicious, especially when you go for what's seasonal: fresh berries in the spring, stone fruit like cherries or nectarines in the summer, and crisp apples in the fall. It satisfies the urge for sweets, and provides you with some fiber and other nutrition in the process.



6. The Three Bites Rule

This is similar to rule #1. The theory here is that once you get past three bites, you're really not eating for taste. You're eating to assuage some other emotional hunger, or to be polite, or because it's in front of you. Not because you're loving it with every fiber of your being. So go ahead, have three bites of anything: cheesecake, birthday cake, pie, ice cream. But make sure you are really loving each bite: the smoothness, creaminess, denseness, richness, crumb, fruitiness, crunch, buttery quality, etc. And then leave it, put it back in the container, give it away, or throw away what's left. You won't miss it, because you don't have to – you had it!



7. Coconut Chia Pudding

This is for when you want something sweet, creamy, and easy. It's kind of like an easy version of rice pudding, only with healthy chia seeds and medium-chain fatty acids from coconut. Simply open a can of coconut milk, preferably the full-fat kind. Add 1/3 cup of chia seeds, a pinch of salt, a dash of vanilla, and 1/4 cup of maple syrup. Stir it up and let it sit on the counter for an hour. The chia seeds begin to pop and make it gelatinous, like a delicious pudding. Keeps well in the refrigerator, and can be "loosened up" to a pudding-like texture when it gets cold and thick by just reheating in the microwave for a few seconds.

8. Brush your teeth

Brushing your teeth is another classic way to shut down a craving for sweets. Most of us don't want to ruin a freshly brushed mouth by throwing in some more food, especially sweets that mandate another full brushing. And, the powerful minty flavors of toothpaste really clash with almost any other sweet you would be wanting to add to the mix, thus ruining your treat as well.

9. Try Xylitol

Xylitol is a crystalline sugar alternative that is naturally derived from birch trees. It looks, feels, and significantly tastes like sugar. And, it's good for your teeth. It's also just a little more intense than sugar, and different enough that it brings your attention more sharply to what you're consuming. It's available at health food stores, and online. You can use it in your coffee, in your baking, etc.

10. More Protein

If you're constantly craving sweets, there's a really good chance you're not eating enough protein. Want proof? Next time you're craving sugar, eat protein instead and see what happens. Then try to consistently add more protein to your meals.

11. Accept No Substitutions.

If you want ice cream, don't get frozen yogurt. If you want a chocolate chip cookie, don't buy gluten-free. If you want cheesecake, don't get the Weight Watchers light version. Get your hands on the precise thing that you want, follow the three bites rule, and get it out of your system. Otherwise, you'll just keep grazing and eating, searching and searching for the one thing you really wanted in the first place.



12. Try My Super Intense Brownies

One or two itty-bitty, super intense, gluten-free brownies, made from my personal recipe, perfected over time, which contains half the usual amount of sugar and about a third more chocolate. I also use an excellent gluten-free flour called Cup4Cup, should you be interested in following the gluten-free route. I find that sometimes, used judiciously, gluten-free foods can be helpful in containing a craving for all things wheat-related.

- Melt 4 ounces butter with 3 ounces of unsweetened baking chocolate (like German's) in a glass dish in the microwave.
- Stir in ½ cup sugar and a pinch of salt.
- Quickly stir in two eggs, one at a time. Don't linger, or they'll start to cook and curdle.
- Add ½ cup of flour.
- If you like a cakey brownie like I do, add ½ a teaspoon of baking powder at this point.
- Stir in ½ cup of mini chocolate chips (I use the Enjoy Life brand, which are gluten-free).
- Pour into a 9" square greased pan and bake for 18 – 20 minutes at 350 degrees. Do not over-bake.
- Allow to cool on a rack.
- Now cut into 16 squares (looks like a regular brownie, right?) and then cut those squares into fourths, so you end up with 64 brownies in that one little pan. Yes, they are about 1" square.

And I promise, savored appropriately, one or two will be quite enough.



13. Lassi

No, not talking about the dog in the 1950s TV series here! I am talking about the most incredibly satisfying Indian yogurt drink. If you're wanting something refreshing, cooling, milky, and creamy, try this. If you use Greek yogurt, you'll get some protein to boot! These are loose guidelines, but all you do is mix about half a cup each of water and milk in the blender with a handful of ice. Add about half a cup of plain yogurt, one or two teaspoons of sugar or xylitol, and whirl it until it liquefies. If you want it super-cold, pour over more ice. Drink and enjoy. If you're feeling adventuresome, add a little cardamom. Here, it's the concept of it being sort of like a milkshake, plus the combination of milk fat, protein, and carb that creates a really creamy and satisfying beverage.

14. Protein smoothie

Back to this idea that maybe you're not getting enough protein. Protein is necessary for satiety, building muscles, and to help you curb intake of carbs. Do NOT make the mistake of loading up on fruits or fruit juices and thinking it's healthy. It's not. Smoothies and juicing are a whole different topic. What I'm talking about here is choosing a satisfying, well-balanced, sweet enough protein powder, and mixing it with water. Many are available in single-serve packets at the natural food stores, and I recommend trying them this way, because protein powder can get expensive, and some of them are really, really nasty in taste or texture. Several of the vegan ones come in flavors like vanilla chai. Not quite the same as an ice blended mocha from your favorite coffee chain, but satisfying nonetheless. I also love the Coconut Chocolate Primal Fuel.

15. A Spoonful of PBJ

You may know that peanut butter is really calorie-dense and fatty. Perfect! A tablespoon is 50 calories, sweet, creamy (crunchy?), and very satisfying, especially when topped with a teaspoon of sugar-free or low-sugar jam. Again, savor it – something that's easy to do because of the texture of the peanut butter. And yes, if your preference is almond butter or some other nut butter, go for it. It's the concept we're after here.

16. Hot Chocolate

Are you noticing a big chocolate theme here? Like most women, I love chocolate! My favorite is made on the stove top, using Mexican chocolate and cinnamon. But ready-made chocolate milk of all types (dairy, almond, coconut, etc.) can be heated up quickly and make for a satisfying sweet treat, without being a major nutritional violation. And actually, chocolate milk is a great post-workout recovery beverage as well!

17. Eat It Mindfully

Eating anything mindfully will naturally reduce the amount you eat. In developing mindfulness, a common exercise is to lovingly explore one Hershey's Kiss. Get the kiss. Look at it. Turn it around. Smell it through the foil. Touch the foil. Slowly unwrap it. Smell it again. Notice any thoughts or feelings that are coming up. Lick it. Taste that lick fully. Put it in your mouth. Feel it start to melt. Really taste the chocolate with all parts of your mouth. Notice your thoughts and feelings. Let it melt as slowly as possible. Marvel at how utterly and completely satisfying one little kiss can be. Apply these principles to any other sweet treats you eat. (Remember the "Three Bites Rule" I mentioned?)

18. Make It Difficult

If you're really battling sweets cravings, you are going to have to make it less accessible. Keep it out of the house, so you have to get in the car and drive somewhere to get it. Package it in plastic, wrap it in foil, and then again in plastic, and shove it in the back and bottom of the freezer, so you have to dig it out, and thaw it out, before you get to eat it. Think about what might work for you.

19. Make It Expensive

Cheap treats satisfy no one. Skip the supermarket chocolate and go for the European stuff. No drug store ice cream; make it super-premium. No warehouse club cakes, pies, or pastries; it's the fancy French bakery for you or nothing! If you've just got to have something lower quality (you know, full of high-fructose corn syrup and hydrogenated oils, umm, yummy!), buy single-serve packets from a vending machine, not an entire box. Or a package of one, even if it's three times more expensive per unit.

I hope these tactics and strategies will be useful to you in effectively managing your sweets cravings, without feeling too deprived. I'd love to hear back from you after you try a few, and of course, to hear what your favorite strategies are as well. Send me a note at PCOSwellnessUSA@gmail.com.



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