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How to Manage Sweets & Treats without Blowing Your Diet

Moving from *mindless* to *mindful* eating

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

As the Chocoholic Dietitian, I believe anyone can achieve *health without guilt or complexity*. There are plenty of smart swaps you can make to satisfy your sweet or savoury tooth. Healthy eating doesn't have to be boring, and there is always room for FUN! The key is moving from *mindless* to *mindful* eating.

Why are sweets and savoury treats so hard to manage?

Psychology research has identified what is known as the “**pleasure principle**” which states that we are instinctually wired to seek pleasure and avoid pain in order to satisfy biological and psychological needs. If the choice is a chocolate bar or a bag of chips, versus raw veggies, as a snack, the pleasure principle makes it hard to choose the healthier option.

We also eat for so many reasons over pure biologic hunger. Food and eating patterns change based on our environment, emotions, stress level, social situation, family ritual, and income level. Sweet treats and savoury foods are common comfort foods consumed in an attempt to stuff uncomfortable emotions.

You don't need to omit sweet treats and savoury foods completely from your diet but instead understand how to shift from *mindless* to *mindful* eating.

What do you mean by *mindless* versus *mindful* eating?

All of us have experienced mindless eating whereby you scarf down a bunch of food without really enjoying what was in front of you. I have experienced “distracted eating” at the movie theatre and found myself at the bottom of a bag of popcorn with little awareness of having crunched the popcorn.

Moving from mindless to mindful eating means pausing, being present, avoiding distraction, and savouring your bites. Mindful eating is especially important when consuming our favourite sweets and savoury treats so that smaller amounts can satisfy a craving (aka “less is more”).

What are 2 tips to help manage sweets and treats?

1. **Frame the Quantity** - instead of eating items like nuts, popcorn, candy, or chocolate almonds etc. directly out of a bag mindlessly at your desk, or in a car, put them in a small bowl or container. It gives yourself an endpoint rather than the end of the entire bag or box.



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2. **Portion packages** - most of us don't eat portions, we eat packages. When making a trip to the store, buy foods that are individual sized or have portion control indicators. This is often more successful than hoping you'll stop at a few handfuls.

- Try single unit ice cream treats (eg. drumstick or fudge sickle versus stashing large containers of ice cream).
- Check out the new [Smarties](#) box which is now partitioned into 3 units, each containing a single portion of 15 Smarties providing 70 calories to help you manage quantity.
- Go with single small or 100 calorie snack packs of potato chips or savory snacks rather than family sized portions

Are there any healthier treats that can satisfy a craving?

Here are some snacks that may help address a sweet or savoury craving while still managing to sneak in some healthy nutrients:

- Homemade frozen yogurt Popsicles (simply stir together yogurt, fruit and milk or juice and freeze in Popsicle holders);
- Raw veggie and pretzel sticks dipped in hummus;
- Whole-grain crackers with cream cheese, cucumber rounds and red pepper slices;
- Celery sticks with peanut butter or almond butter;
- Chocolate monkey smoothie: chocolate milk, banana and crushed ice whirled together in the blender;
- Hot cocoa made with milk or homemade vanilla milk (milk or soy milk with vanilla and a pinch of brown sugar).

What do you mean by “chewing around a craving?”

I've seen many of my clients (myself included!) sample a wide range of healthy foods in your kitchen hoping this will satisfy a craving only to find yourself unsatisfied. Tune into what you are craving and determine if a substitute will work – if it won't you're better off having some of what you crave instead of “chewing around a craving.”

As the *chocoholic dietitian*, if I am craving chocolate, sometimes a mug of calcium rich hot cocoa may satisfy, while other times the only thing that will do the trick is the real deal. In this case, using the tips above to frame the quantity and use portion packages can help.

Andrea Holwegner, known as the Chocoholic Dietitian, is founder and president of Health Stand Nutrition Consulting Inc., a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and a media expert for the Dietitians of Canada. For nutrition counselling information and to sign up for a free monthly newsletter loaded with nutrition tips, recipes and more visit www.healthstandnutrition.com. Twitter @chocoholicRD.

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