



# Eat.Q. QUICK TIP & EXERCISE

Emotional intelligence skills help you respond mindfully to your cravings and impulses. It is fine to answer a craving for chocolate and other tasty foods now and then. But for many people, it is difficult to know how to cope with frequent and repeated cravings. Here are some ideas:

**STEP ONE:** Ask yourself how intense is the craving on a scale from 1-5.

## CRAVING METER

- 5 **VERY INTENSE:** You want to eat it right now! You have a desire for a specific food and you feel a very strong urge for it.
- 4 **STRONG:** The craving is fairly strong. You may notice it nagging at you and it is difficult not to think about.
- 3 **MODERATE:** You notice the craving but feel that you might be able to manage it.
- 2 **LOW:** A fairly mild craving. You notice it but you can also think about something else.
- 1 **WEAK:** You may notice some desire to eat but can easily walk away.

**STEP TWO:** Assess your craving level. If you are a 3-5, try one of the following to cope with the craving:

- 1) Think of the food with a different texture or properties. For example, imagine French Fries being cold and hard (yuck!) or drinking a warm milkshake.
- 2) Focus on the immediate benefits of thoughtfully answering the craving (I won't feel regret right now).
- 3) If you can't avoid the craving—eat it mindfully. Slow down. Try to savor each bite.
- 4) Visualize a yield sign. A yield sign is a reminder to slow down rather than stop. You look both ways and proceed with caution. Think about approaching your plate with the same mind-set.
- 5) Delay. Make a deal with yourself. Set your phone alarm for five minutes. If you still have a craving when the bell rings, give yourself permission to eat it. Cravings tend to pass quickly.
- 6) Take the edge off. Don't fight the food craving, which often takes Herculean effort. Instead, find a way to relax instead. Sit down. Take a break. Send an e-mail.
- 7) Ask yourself "what if". What if I don't eat this? Will it make a difference to me in an hour? Will I really miss it?
- 8) Visual images ramp up cravings and stimulate your appetite. Stare for three minutes at a neutral visual object (e.g., a picture on the wall). Your brain has to process what you are looking at, which diverts your thoughts away from picturing the craved item.
- 9) Determine if you want it just because you see it. Use the out of sight, out of mind principle. Cover it up. Put it in a drawer. Take it out of your immediate line of sight.
- 10) Research indicates that thinking about food in a different context can help shift your cravings. For example, thinking about a bowl of whipped cream as a bowl of shaving cream, can instantly cool down a craving.

Learn more from *Eat.Q.*, by Susan Albers, Psy.D.  
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