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The Psychology of Food Cravings & Emotional Eating

-By Dr. Peta Stapleton, Terri Sheldon, Brett Porter
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Why Do We Have Food Cravings?

One important factor which may influence appetite control is the notion of food cravings (Blundell & Finlayson, 2004; Strachan, Ewing, Frier, Harper, & Daery, 2004). This overwhelming urge to consume a particular food appears strong in overweight dieters, and many theories have posited why this is so. The nutritional and homeostatic role of food cravings is described by physiological theories and explains why cravings might be more present in people who are deprived of food (Wardle, 1987). The psychoactive abilities of certain foods to trigger cravings are likened to a self-medication behaviour and thought to relieve a central serotonin deficit (Wurtman & Wurtman, 1986). Psychological theories stress the role of negative emotions (e.g. anger) as triggers for cravings (Rogers et al., 1994) and learning theories claim that cravings are a positive learnt response to cues (sensory, situational) and giving into a craving results in a pleasurable consequence (Rozin, Levine, & Stoess, 1991). What is evident here is that food cravings are a multi-dimensional and complex occurrence, one which possibly involves aspects of all of the proposed theories.

Whatever the reason, it is suggested that food cravings frequently lead to consumption of the craved food (Hill & Heaton-Brown, 1994) and elevated Body Mass Index (BMI) is associated with food intake and preference for high fat foods (Drewnowski et al., 1985). Even in non-clinical samples, food craving has been found to be related to body weight, suggesting the significant role of craving in food consumption (Franken & Muris, 2005). Early identification of elevated body mass indexes (BMI), medical risks, and unhealthy eating and physical activity habits may be essential to the future prevention of obesity. One crucial question is the role food cravings may play in maintaining excessive eating patterns observed in other problems with eating behaviours: binge eating, bulimia, and obesity (Weingarten & Elston, 1990).

Food Cravings and Weight Gain: The Missing Link

There is thorough and outstanding evidence regarding the increase in worldwide rates of obesity and the projected outcomes if this is not addressed. Children in particular are noted as being especially at risk of

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Psychology of Food Cravings (Continued)

future long term health problems. While dietary restraint, more nutritious eating habits and physical exercise have always been purported to be the answer to the obesity crisis in adults, adolescents and children, long term meta analysis and follow-up studies indicate that weight loss is not maintained (and indeed the more time that elapses between the end of a diet and the follow-up, the more weight is regained, Mann et al., 2007). Unfortunately, several other studies indicate that dieting is actually a consistent predictor of future weight gain.

A recent study conducted by Patricia Goodspeed Grant (2008) involved investigating the psychological, cultural and social contributions to overeating in obese people. She found that eating for comfort for the morbidly obese is rooted in using food to manage experiences of emotional pain and difficult family and social relationships. Her participants reported that what had been missing from all treatment programs they had tried was the "opportunity to work on the psychological issues concurrently with weight loss".

It appears that a missing link in the treatment of overweight and obesity is this concept and issue of addressing the psychological contributors or emotional drivers that are leading people to overeat. Relying on willpower and education is clearly not enough.

Motivation Issues

Humans are only motivated by feelings (i.e. sensations). There are basically three types of feelings; pleasant, neutral and unpleasant. The motivation we get from the unpleasant feeling is to move towards a feeling we do not have, but do want. We move away from the unpleasant feeling by replacing it with a different pleasant (or neutral) feeling.

Hunger, is an unpleasant sensation (for most people) and is relieved by the pleasant sensation (for most people) of eating and the taste of food. Like other basic functions, this is so that we can survive, individually and as a species. Most of us prefer pleasant sensations over unpleasant sensations. But pleasant sensations are not always matched with the outcome that they were designed for. Many people eat, not because they need nutrition, but because they feel an unpleasant emotion, like rejection, loneliness, distress, depression, fear, betrayal, worthlessness, defeat, helplessness or hopelessness. This emotional over-consumption of food often leads to fat-gain and other health problems. This can then create a vicious cycle of more emotional eating to manage the emotional consequences of becoming overweight and unhealthy.

For children, excessive eating and bingeing are often a consequence of boredom and habit behaviours. Food or drinks are used to relieve the monotony. They can also be used as a coping strategy to deal with problems arising from anxiety, depression, stress and conflicts. Although they may feel comforted after consuming an amount of food, the person has not dealt with the underlying cause of these problems.

TAPPING TIP

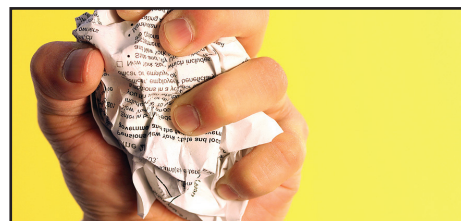
Write down 10 things for which you are grateful... your pets, your health, where you live, your friends, etc. Tap on your gratitude list every day, one statement on each point. :)

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

-Howard Thurman

What to look forward to in

JUNE



Rick Wilkes on
Using Tapping for Anger

Fred Gallo on
Alternative Tapping Techniques

Margaret Lynch on
(Video Interview) **The 4 Kinds of Money**

Carol Look on
Feeling Safe to Change



Psychology of Food Cravings (Continued)

This sets up a reward cycle of using food to get a better feeling. Consequently, there is no reason why they will not reoccur in the future. This can become a vicious cycle.

If a parent deals with their own emotional issues by eating and or over eating it is highly probable that the child will also do so. This pattern for coping is being modelled. Parents often find it difficult to tolerate their child's disappointment or pain and are motivated to take this away. If food is used regularly as a means of doing this, for example, "Never mind not getting invited let's go get a chocolate sundae," a parent can be setting up a cycle of soothing uncomfortable feelings with the pleasure of food. This again can set up a pattern of eating to manage feelings. This is particularly a problem when there is no real discussion of the child's pain or disappointment and instead food is just offered.

Have a think right now: why is it that you want to stop emotionally eating? You might immediately know, or you might have to think for some time. Finish this sentence out loud:

When I stop eating in response to my emotions, I will

Your answer/s will give you some insight into how you are motivated.

If you are motivated towards pleasurable outcomes, you might have said things like:

- When I stop eating in response to my emotions I will be able to buy clothes 'off the rack' in the shops
- When I stop eating in response to my emotions I will be happy

If you are motivated away from negative outcomes your answers may reflect:

- When I stop eating in response to my emotions I will not be uncomfortable in my clothes anymore
- When I stop eating in response to my emotions I will be able to throw away my 'fat' clothes

You have probably noticed the patterns here. Moving towards pleasurable outcomes or away from a negative one, affects how we think, feel and behave. You might find that you have a combination of moving towards some outcomes and away from others. This is fine too. More often than not, we are primarily subconsciously motivated in one direction.

Motivation has also been shown to exist either as an internal



characteristic or as an external factor in people in general. Internal motivation is linked to neurological circuitry in the left prefrontal lobe; the feelings of accomplishment, passion for work, excitement in our day all link to the left prefrontal cortex (Davidson et al. 2000). It is this area of the brain, which governs motivating behaviour. It discourages pessimistic feelings and encourages action. The reality is that some people naturally possess a high level of this internal motivation; those who focus on the internal feelings of satisfaction they will attain despite any difficulties they face along the way. However others require more than this.

External motivation is any external influence or stimuli to generate positive behaviour. These might include monetary rewards such as bonuses, tangible recognition or honour, prizes, or other incentives...

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FEATURED VIDEO

EFT FOR ABUNDANCE with Carol Look

Carol Looks Reveals How to Quickly and Easily Identify Your Most Stubborn and Persistent Blocks to Attracting More Money into Your Life and Clear Them Using the EFT Tapping.

In this candid video interview with EFT Master Carol Look, you'll discover:

- Practical ways to identify and clear your existing resistance around money
- How self-sabotage plays in to your financial situation and what to do to change it
- The huge mistake 95% of the people out there are making with the Law of Attraction
- Step-by-step tap-alongs to clear blocks to attracting abundance



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FEATURED INTERVIEW

CHRONIC FATIGUE with Rue Hass

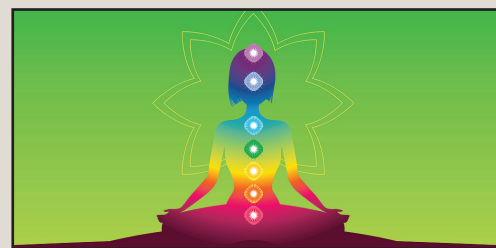
People who suffer from chronic fatigue often beat themselves up because they can't perform the way the rest of the world does.

In this interview, Rue Hass will explain how she looks at this challenge medically, energetically and spiritually.

You'll also learn how the way you handle other people's expectations can be contributing to your symptoms.

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FEATURED TELECLASS



HARNESSING THE POWER OF THE CHAKRAS with Margaret Lynch

Due to the popularity of the September 2010 Tapping Through the Chakras teleclass, Margaret Lynch has agreed to come back and finish guiding us through the remaining Chakras.

If you want to become more in tune with yourself and harness the chakras to be in your power, this teleclass series will finish filling in the gaps.

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JUNE TELECLASS

MAKING THE CHANGE

with Mary Ayers

We either choose to change or change chooses us. Change is inevitable part of life so the question is what is your relationship with change?



Whether you are going through a major life change or you want to go through a big change this teleclass will guide you in making those smooth transitions. Mary will help you clear the 4 big barriers that make change hard. By the end of this teleclass you will embrace change and experience all it's blessings!

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MEMBER FEEDBACK

"Thank you so much for putting this site together! Thank you for your hard work and GREAT information! I have learned so much since joining and it is my first "go to" site when I have a question or am struggling with an issue. I feel it opened a door for me to improve myself in areas I thought I always had to just "live with." I am excited about changing my life for the better!"

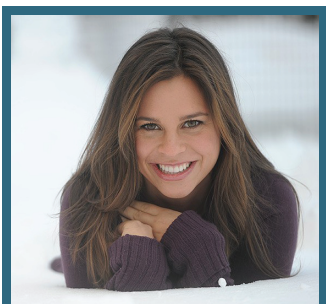
-Lori

Thanks for Joining the Tapping Insiders Club!

"I am new to tapping, however I found the transforming energy technique powerful. Thank you for the opportunity to learn such a wonderful way to integrate positive thoughts and literally create a transformation on the cellular level! I will be looking more into this technique and using it my daily regimen."

-Ann Miller

Overcoming the Trauma of Abuse with Sophia Cayer



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