


# Understanding Your Eating Habits

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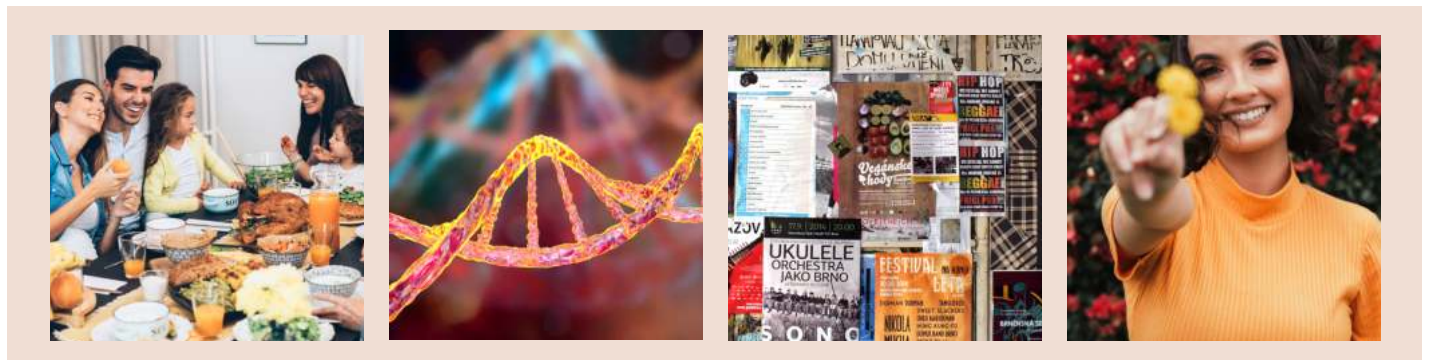
What are you craving?

As it turns out, cravings aren't just due to the dopamine-inducing effects of our favorite foods. Social and cultural factors, nutrient deficiencies, biological factors, your past, and how you personally cope with challenges influence your dietary desires. Surprisingly, food marketing can also affect the way you think and behave toward food.

By learning about the biological, mental, and social components behind our food choices, we can better understand why we crave the foods we do and how to change our thinking and behavior.

## How We Think About Food

The way we think about food varies depending on our economic means, education, and individual preferences and beliefs.[1] Our cultures, including the industries within it (i.e., marketing, food production), and families can also play a part in what, when, and how much you decide to eat. It's common for familial and cultural habits or beliefs to be passed down from one generation to the next. While family genetics play a role in how our bodies function, lifestyle choices tend to have a greater effect on how our genes are expressed and, therefore, operate.



When we are unaware of the reasons behind our eating habits, it's difficult to make better choices, and our health may suffer. Consider the variations in health of different countries around the world and how their beliefs and values affect their food choices and, in turn, their health. In America, for example, portions are much larger, and we tend to think we need to eat more to feel full and satisfied. This is illustrated by marketing slogans like “super-size me!” or how restaurants select larger plate sizes.[1] By understanding the way marketing, portion sizes, cultural norms, and how our families can influence us, we can evaluate our behavior, beliefs, and preferences. We then have an opportunity to change our habits and what we consider “normal.”

## Biological Components

Our bodies are always attempting to maintain homeostasis. Doreen Virtue, the author of *Constant Cravings*, explains homeostasis by stating, “All creatures are driven to fulfill their basic needs for food, water, rest, shelter, and peace of mind. If any of these needs go unfulfilled, your body signals you to correct the situation.”[2]

Another biological factor that can influence our decisions is nutrients. Every cell, organ system, and all physiology requires nourishment to function properly. For example, neurotransmitters need certain nutrients to work. If we don't eat a nutritious diet, we may also find that our mood is affected by these altered neurotransmitters.[3] This can exacerbate the cycle of eating comfort and junk foods to improve our mood. Stress on the body in the form of mental, physical, and emotional stress can drain our nutrient resources.[4] Nutrients need to be restored, and a sense of balance needs to be obtained to recover properly. In some cases, additional support for healing and repair may be vital to return to a normal state.



*"Food cravings may also reveal an emotional need we are trying to meet, such as feeling love and relief."*

It's also common to confuse biological signals such as hunger and thirst. These life-sustaining human drives are regulated by the same part of the brain, which can lead to misinterpretation. Thirst drives are also commonly ignored in favor of other higher pleasure or more stimulating forms of food and beverage consumption.

## Emotional Components

Biology, social factors, and individual characteristics can all influence how we experience and cope with emotions. Some people tend to manage their emotions by soothing themselves with feel-good food. Eating sugary or fatty foods because we're stressed is common. When someone uses food as a coping mechanism, their personality, family background, social influences, and nutritional status should be analyzed to determine the contributing causes. Food cravings may also reveal an emotional need we are trying to meet, such as feeling love and relief. In Doreen Virtue's book, *Constant Cravings*, she explains, "Cravings occur for two reasons: a desire to feel better emotionally, or to shift our energy level." Furthermore, she states, "Every food you crave has mood- or energy-altering properties that return you to homeostasis." [1]

Following are some possible emotionally based interpretations for why we crave certain foods as outlined in Doreen Virtue's book [2]:

**Chili:** Virtue suggests that you may be "wanting excitement and an outlet for stress."



**Crunchy peanut butter cookies:** Virtue states that you may be tense and frustrated by “a lack of fun.”

**Mint chocolate chip ice cream:** According to Virtue, it’s probable that you’re feeling tired and frustrated due to all your responsibilities and “a perceived lack of love, time, money, or motivation.”

**Soft fruit craving:** Virtue explains this could be due to fear and a tendency to focus on everyone else’s needs while neglecting your own, resulting in depleted vitamins and minerals.

**Hamburger:** You may be feeling insecure, unclear, and in need of direction, energy, and motivation, according to Virtue.

## **Conclusion:**

The connection between the mind, body, and spirit can be apparent in our food choices and the influences driving them. It’s important to look at all the possible causes of imbalances to determine the best support. Keep in mind that more than one factor could be influencing your lifestyle. It’s also important to remember that homeostasis, and its occasional need-based nutrient cravings, will continue to be the mechanism the body uses to bring internal balance, which is a blessing! If you’re concerned about your eating habits, consider working with a natural health professional, physician, or another healthcare practitioner to discover the possible root cause of your concerns.

You can discover more about nutrition, emotions, and supportive lifestyle tools in our Certified Natural Health Professional program. To learn more and enroll, visit [trinityschool.org/program/cnhp](http://trinityschool.org/program/cnhp) or call 800-428-0408, option 2, to speak with an Enrollment Specialist.



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### References

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