

# Does Chocolate Addiction Exist?

by Jane Collingwood, [PsychCentral](#)

Chocolate craving is very common, but can we actually be addicted to it? Can these powerful urges to eat truly be classed as an addiction?

We generally crave foods due to external prompts and our emotional state, rather than actual hunger. We tend to be bored, anxious, or depressed immediately before experiencing cravings, so one way of explaining cravings is self-medication for feeling miserable.

Chocolate is the most frequently craved food in women, and many women describe themselves as 'chocoholics.' Chocoholics insist that it is habit-forming, that it produces an instant feeling of well-being, and even that abstinence leads to withdrawal symptoms.

When we eat sweet and high-fat foods, including chocolate, serotonin is released, making us feel happier. This partly explains the cravings common in seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and pre-menstrual syndrome.

In many women, the craving occurs on a monthly cycle, which suggests a hormonal basis. A recent report in the *New Scientist* magazine suggests people can become overly dependent on the sugar and fat in fast food. Princeton University researcher Dr. John Hoebel found that rats fed on sugar became anxious when the sugar was removed. Their symptoms included chattering teeth and the shakes - similar to those seen in people withdrawing from nicotine or morphine. Dr. Hoebel believes high-fat foods stimulate opioids or "pleasure chemicals" in the brain. This theory is backed up by many other studies.

Chocolate contains several biologically active ingredients, all of which can cause abnormal behaviors and psychological sensations like those of other addictive substances. Researchers at the University of Tampere in Finland found that self-proclaimed chocolate "addicts" salivated more in the presence of chocolate, and showed a more negative mood and higher anxiety. The researchers state that chocolate addicts show traits of regular addiction, because they exhibit craving for chocolate, irregular eating behavior, and abnormal moods.

Although there are similarities between eating chocolate and drug use, generally researchers believe that chocolate "addiction" is not a **true addiction**. While chocolate does contain potentially mood-altering substances, these are all found in higher concentrations in other less appealing foods such as broccoli. A combination of chocolate's sensory characteristics — sweetness, texture and aroma — nutrients, and chemicals, together with hormonal and mood swings, largely explains chocolate cravings.

Chocolate is seen as "naughty but nice" - tasty, but something which should be resisted. This suggests that the desire is more likely a cultural phenomenon than a physical one. The inability to control eating may be a result of inborn traits and today's environment. "Humans used to have to search for food," according to Baylor College of Medicine researcher Dr. Ken Goodrick. "Now food searches us out."

We are overwhelmed with advertising, large-scale grocery displays, plenty of high-calorie foods, and an obsession with thinness. The stress of modern living often makes us turn to food for comfort, then return to a restrictive **diet**. The attempt to restrain ourselves before we are satisfied increases the desire for chocolate.

**Reference website:** <http://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/food-and-mood/lifestyle-changes/does-chocolate-addiction-exist.aspx>