

# Keep those cravings at bay

*Your diet can be going well – and then along comes temptation. We suggest eight foolproof ways to combat it and get back on track*

**N**o man is an island – but trying to change the food you eat is akin to surrounding yourself with water. Build some bridges to the mainland and use them when you feel your personal “diet island” is becoming claustrophobic. Knowing they are there will make your diet easier. The temptation therapies here are simple techniques aimed at reducing the stress associated with dieting and food cravings. They will prevent you from slipping back into old habits at times of stress or emotional upheaval.

## 1. MANAGE STRESS

Stress has an uncanny ability to promote hunger

and cravings while providing an “excuse” to drop off your diet. You tell yourself that once the stress is gone you’ll be right back on track, but it never works like that. Inevitably, snacking becomes a regular event, which makes you feel worse, causes more stress and makes you crave another snack. Pretty soon you’ve blown your diet.

So, instead of reaching for the ice-cream, turn to some simple stress-management techniques. Take five, slow deep breaths with your eyes shut; or try three-minutes of seated meditation; listening to your favourite music; or playing with a pet. Making lifestyle changes to reduce overall stress levels is important, too.

## 2. SET DIET COMMANDMENTS

Diet commandments are phrases and thoughts that act as reminders and motivators when you have a craving, and keep you feeling positive. Start by writing down reasons why you want to lose weight. These may be as simple as wanting more energy or to reduce your blood-cholesterol levels, or you may want to provide a positive role model for your children.

Write down what it would mean to you to be slimmer, healthier, energetic and happy. Now write down what it feels like to be overweight, tired and unhealthy. Identify with those feelings, and understand why you



no longer want to experience them, and that you are making the conscious decision to replace them with positive, healthy ones. Start each day by reading these commandments. Keep them near you so that when you have a craving, you can simply re-read your list and understand why you should not give in. In time, your body will “hear” this message, and it will be easier to follow the diet.

## 3. WRITE A JOURNAL

Start your journal when a food craving begins to edge its way into your day. Jot down what you crave and how you are feeling. Think back and try to understand what is driving you towards that snack. Are you feeling overworked or overwhelmed, frustrated, angry, upset or depressed? Are you really hungry, or just bored?

Recognising your craving patterns and the reasons behind them is the most important purpose of the journal. Awareness and knowledge are your best forms of defence. Use your journal for positive affirmation as well. Describe how you feel at the end of the first week when you step on the scales and find you have already lost a couple of pounds.

## 4. DISTRACT YOURSELF

Most food cravings dissipate in 10 minutes, so distracting your mind will allow one to pass harmlessly. Try doing a crossword or Sudoku, or reading a few pages of a book. Occupy your hands with knitting. Painting your nails is helpful as by the time they are dry, the



craving is long gone. Some people use movement to distract them; simply leaving their desk and walking around the office, or shutting the door and moving away from the kitchen can help.

## 5. TEAM UP WITH A BUDDY

Ask a friend to be your support buddy – someone you can call on when you start to crave. Having someone there to tell you “No” will reinforce your commitment.

Whether or not they are following the diet with you, let your other friends know what you are doing so that in social situations, they help you stick to the programme, rather than encouraging you to deviate. It will benefit them, too, for they may make better food choices in your presence as well.

## 6. REWARD YOURSELF

We all need rewards; the secret of success is to make those rewards calorie-free. When you start the diet, think of something that brings you pleasure, such as a massage, a pedicure, coffee with a friend or shopping. Try to work these rewards into your schedule.

Choose a reward that you would not normally give yourself – a new outfit, or a day at the spa. Place a reward jar in your kitchen, or on your desk at work. Every time you beat a craving, place a pound or two inside the jar. If you cheat a pound must come out. At the end of a chosen period, treat yourself to something special.

## 7. GET ENOUGH SLEEP

People who work nights or need to stay up late often snack. Sleep deprivation increases levels of the major hunger messenger, neuropeptide Y, in the brain, which promotes cravings and the desire to

snack. It also increases levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which makes you feel hungrier all day.

Once the calories from your evening meal have been used up you begin to burn your energy stores. Although you switch to fat-burning mode after three to four hours, there is a significant increase in this metabolism after about eight to nine hours. It stops the moment you eat breakfast. So, eating early allows your food to digest and promotes more restful sleep.

## 8. SEX

Foods high in sugar and fat cause the brain to release more of the “reward” messenger, dopamine. This makes you feel good and it is the rise in dopamine these foods produce that attracts us to them.

However, sex also increases your dopamine levels, makes you feel good, reduces hunger and helps you lose weight.

No one is recommending that you get amorous every time you fancy a bag of crisps – that might raise a few eyebrows on the bus! – but within a relationship, maintaining a healthy sex life can certainly help your diet. A peak in dopamine levels satisfies your reward centre, keeping your mind off other satisfying treats. It will decrease levels of your hunger hormone, further reducing cravings, and you will be burning off calories.

● *‘The No Crave Diet’ by Dr Penny Kendall-Reed and Dr Stephen Reed (Virgin, £10.99) is available to Telegraph readers for £8.99 + 99p p&p. To order, call Telegraph Books on 0870 428 4112 or go to [books.telegraph.co.uk](http://books.telegraph.co.uk)*

**TOMORROW**  
Phase 2 - a recipe for life

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## LUNCH RECIPE

**French Cassoulet with pork, lamb or beef (use diced, extra-firm tofu as a vegetarian option)**  
Makes 6-8 servings

2tbsp olive oil  
250g/9fl oz dry white wine  
3tbsp tomato purée  
1.2 litres/2 pints vegetable stock  
100g diced lean pork loin, lamb or beef

100g/7oz dried haricot or cannellini beans  
1 Spanish onion, halved  
1 red onion, chopped  
4 whole cloves of garlic  
1 celery stick, chopped

150g/5oz trimmed Brussels sprouts, cut in half  
2 carrots, cut into 1cm/1/2in rounds  
20g/9oz mushrooms, coarsely chopped  
1/2 acorn squash, cut into 2.5cm/1in chunks  
250g/9oz celeriac, cut into 1cm/1/2in pieces  
1 sprig fresh thyme  
1 bay leaf  
1tbsp fresh rosemary, chopped  
2 sprigs fresh parsley  
1tsp each dried oregano and thyme  
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

1. Soak beans in water overnight. Place the drained beans, onion, stock, garlic, parsley, thyme and bay leaf in a large pot and bring to the boil. Cover and simmer for 90 minutes.
2. Cook the pork, lamb, beef or tofu in a skillet until browned and set aside.
3. Strain the cooking liquid into a large bowl and reserve. Remove the onion and herbs from the beans and set the beans aside. Preheat oven to 220°C, Gas 7.
4. Toss the carrots, squash and celery root with the 2tbsp oil. Season to taste. Spread the coated vegetables on a foil-lined baking sheet and roast for 25 minutes, until brown but firm.
5. Reduce oven to 180°C, Gas 4. In a large pot, heat 2tbsp oil over a medium-high heat and add the red onion, celery, Brussels sprouts and mushrooms. Stir occasionally for 10 minutes.
6. Stir in the wine, tomato paste, rosemary, oregano and thyme and a bit more salt and pepper to taste. Cook for 2 minutes longer. Now stir in the beans.
7. Spread half of the bean mixture on the bottom of a 4 litre oven-proof casserole. Top with the roasted vegetables and the remainder of the bean mixture.
8. Pour in the reserved cooking liquid and bake uncovered for another 90 minutes.

● For breakfast and dinner recipes, visit [telegraph.co.uk/teamtelegraph](http://telegraph.co.uk/teamtelegraph)