

HOW TO FIGHT CRAVINGS AND WIN!

BY KAREN MCCOY

Think back to high school biology and you'll probably have a memory buried somewhere of a Russian researcher named **Ivan Pavlov**. Pavlov, you may recall, repeatedly rang a dinner bell right before feeding his dogs a big, juicy steak. Eventually, the dogs would salivate at the sound of the bell. Pavlov had trained his dogs to have a physiological response to a neutral stimulus - a bell - simply because the bell was associated with food.

Think about that the next time you're at the movies and pass the popcorn stand.

Our brains are wired in much the same way as the brains of Pavlov's dogs. We associate all sorts of things with food - from a holiday celebration to a fight with our spouse. Food nourishes us - but it also comforts us, soothes us and even medicates us when we're feeling anxious, lonely or tired. And it helps us celebrate when we're feeling happy. Put that together with the fact that obscene amounts of food are everywhere and you have a perfect recipe for eating disorders and mass obesity.

But just as we were conditioned to associate food - and overeating - with all sorts of things, we can undo that conditioning. It's not easy - but it's also not as hard as you might think. And it generally takes no more than 21 days.

Our overeating triggers are actually chains of events - like Christmas tree lights that go on in sequence. A stressful argument leads to feeling helpless which leads to a journey into the kitchen which leads to ten packs of ring-dings. Usually the chain of events is faster and shorter - think of feeling stress and immediately reaching for a cigarette.

So here's the trick: **short circuit the chain**.

I call this short-circuiting “**putting a chink in the link**”. Break the circuit and the remaining lights don't fire up. You can accomplish the same thing with your overeating triggers.

First, isolate exactly what your triggers are. (*Write them down*.)

Next: “**put a chink in the link**” by **substituting a new activity** for the destructive activity (much like an addict learns to go to the gym and get "high" from running). Try any one of these simple activities next time you hit one of your triggers:

- **Do 10 push-ups**
- **Brush your teeth**
- **Go for a walk** (the endorphins released will often balance the chemistry of a craving brain)
- **Write down what you're feeling**. Try "being" with that feeling for five minutes.
- **Eat a pickle** (eating something completely different from what you're craving kills the craving - try eating a hot pepper when you're craving chocolate and you'll instantly see what I mean)
- **Reward yourself with a relaxing activity** you normally wouldn't do - i.e. a warm bath or uninterrupted reading of glossy magazines!

Most cravings (and overeating triggers) only last **15 minutes**. If you can outwait - or outwit - them, you can beat them. Tell yourself "I can have this food" (thus eliminating thoughts of deprivation) but "I have to wait just 15 minutes".

You'll be amazed (and happily surprised) at how differently you'll feel 15 minutes later!