

Resisting the irresistible:

Controlling our 'hedonistic hunger'

ONE OF OUR clients was telling me how happy he feels when he's consistently eating healthy food, except for one unavoidable situation. On his way home after watching a movie, he walked by Krispy Kreme, smelled it and that's when the powerful urge sets in. In short, he got home with half a dozen doughnuts and ate them all.

Sounds familiar?

For most of mankind's history the main reason for seeking food was survival, but today, much of our food intake occurs mostly for other reasons. We all know that the amount of food we eat every day is not only affected by internal factors such as hormones, but also by external factors such as food availability and advertising. Italian researchers have uncovered evidence that regardless of how "full" a person may feel, the body is hard-wired to chemically reward itself by overeating when tempted by yummy foods. The study on so-called "hedonic hun-



ger" has identified a physiological link between indulging in goodies well beyond the point of caloric "need" and a reactive jump in levels of two key chemicals. One chemical is ghrelin, a hormone produced in the stomach that helps regulate reward and motivation. The other is a compound known as "2-AG," which is involved in appetite.

Food consumption that is not driven by caloric need but for pleasure – hence the term "hedonic hunger" – affects body mass and contributes to the surge of obesity. Recent data suggests that obese people prefer and consume highly palatable foods more than do those of "normal weight." This happens because people of normal weight consciously decide to eat less than they really want – they curb their hedonic hunger. This means that almost everybody is affected by hedonic hunger, including athletes who can be more susceptible to hedonic hunger as a result of increased appetites resulting from more exercise.

How can we control hedonic hunger? One way is to reduce our exposure to palatable foods. That means not looking, smelling or even thinking about food. Researchers from the Medical University of South Carolina recently revealed that dieters were most successful when they could overcome "hedonic hunger," or appetite linked to outside cues.

However, since overeating is often triggered by deeply rooted psychological motives such as comfort seeking or escaping negative emotions, a range of so-called "non-stressful cognitive activities" can increase food intake. Experts also suggest that we should choose blander foods in an effort to reduce hedonic hunger.

Satiety may have a small effect on the pleasantness of foods. It is the availability of palatable food, a tendency toward overeating, and deliberate attempts to avoid overeating that cause more frequent episodes of hedonic hunger.

It's not enough to say, "Eat less and exercise more." Changing specific behavior makes a difference. The best indicator for a successful weight loss is better control of eating prompted by food-related cues such as the smell or sight of food, talking, reading or even just thinking about food. And maybe the best solution is to satisfy our hedonic hunger with palatable foods that are also healthy.

Looking fabulous for my Bora Bora honeymoon

As my honeymoon in Bora Bora approached, I really wanted to step up my game to be ready to swim with the sharks all day and look my best in all the photos. I decided the best way to achieve this would be one-on-one workouts with a personal trainer in order to develop greater muscle definition, as my own routines had started to go stale and my progress hit a plateau.



With a great staff that is flexible to your needs and schedule, Bench Gym was a great choice to help me pursue

this goal. They listened to my goal and tailored a program to help me achieve it. Everyone on the Bench Gym team has a positive attitude, and that made it a great place to go. I really looked forward to my sessions. Each session was varied and never boring. They really push you to your real potential. Thanks Bench Gym! You guys were great and really helped me out. – Rachel Scarr