

Episode: Cravings



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HEALTHY EATING FOR BUSY WOMEN PODCAST
WITH KAT RENTAS

Episode: Cravings

Hello. Welcome back to the podcast. I hope you're having a wonderful week so far. I just want to dive right into this week's topic. Because we're going to talk about arguably the biggest struggle I see women talk about when it comes to eating healthy. And that is cravings. Whether it's managing one's cravings with food or eliminating them all together, this is something so many women are struggling with. And it's a really hot topic in the health community, right? It seems like every health magazine or health website I come across talk about eliminating your cravings and yada, yada, yada. Because they know that it's what you really want right? You want to get rid of all of your cravings that feel totally out of control, so you can finally eat healthy and make decisions with food that feel like they are under your control. I know exactly how this feels. For most of us, and myself in the past, we feel like if we can just get rid of our cravings for unhealthy foods that our problems would be solved. And that we could finally eat healthy easily. And there's actually a lot of misinformation that's going around when it comes to cravings. And it can all feel very confusing and messy. So, in this episode, I really wanted to provide you ultimate clarity on what cravings actually are and what you can do to manage your cravings so you're able to eat healthy very intentionally moving forward. This is going to be the clarity I would have killed to have back in the day. Because the reason why cravings were such a problem for me, is that they left me feeling totally out of control with food. This is where I felt completely powerless. And it's highly likely this is the case for you. Because you may not know exactly why the cravings are happening. Or what to do with them. And this isn't something any of us are taught, right? We're all eaters. We all grow up to be eaters for the rest of our lives. But no one teaches us what is happening when we're relentlessly craving food. So, because we don't know exactly why these cravings are happening we're left feeling totally out of control. And feeling out of control with food is a really discouraging and painful place to be in. I know first hand. I remember that I would continuously crave either salty

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foods or sweet foods. And it would go back and forth. Sometimes I would relentlessly crave fast food that was really greasy and salty. And sometimes I would crave super sweet foods. Like ice cream or cookies or something like that. And I would have this push and pull of making healthy changes and then having those changes be totally derailed by my intense cravings. And this is what led me to incorporating cheat days with food. Which, if you haven't listened to my episode on "Cheat Meals" be sure to go back and listen to that. I describe exactly why that method never worked out. But the point here is that I felt intense cravings much of the time. And I didn't know why they were happening. All I knew is that I felt like I couldn't resist the cravings for food no matter what. And at the time, I legitimately convinced myself that I was just addicted to certain foods. Like, I was a special unicorn that had some crazy addiction to sugar. Or super salty, greasy foods. And like I had a problem that no one else had. Which made me feel completely awful. This was definitely not a good place to be in with my eating habits or body. I felt totally out of control with all of it. And, it all felt super, super, super dramatic. And what I want you to know, here with me today in this podcast, is that there's nothing dramatic about your cravings. If you are having intense cravings for food, then they are happening for very legitimate, good reasons. And your cravings aren't personal whatsoever. In fact, they are totally natural. Whaaat? This may be news to you. There is nothing inherently negative about the cravings you're experiencing. And nothing has gone wrong. Just let this sink in for a moment. Because this will likely go against everything you've been told about your cravings. Now, I'm going to explain exactly why this is. So, don't worry if your brain is like, "There's no way. I hate my cravings. They need to go". I'm going to explain exactly why there's nothing inherently wrong with your cravings.

First, let's talk about exactly what a craving is. A craving is a signal from your brain or body to desire food. Sometimes specific foods. This is it. It's a signal

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from your brain or body to desire food. And there's exact reasons why cravings occur. They can occur from your brain or your body. Meaning, they can be emotional or more physical where you experience them in your physical body. And, I'm going to talk about the difference with each. Because it's very different.

If you're experiencing a craving from your body physically, it's less dramatic. So, this is simply an awareness from your body that you're not currently feeling satisfied from food. And that there's food your body is craving to fulfill those satisfaction factors that your body has. So examples of what your body might crave. It may crave something salty. It may crave something sweet. It may crave crunchy foods. It may crave protein. It may crave fat. It may crave carbohydrates. Your body will crave aspects of food that it feels like it's missing in terms of it's satisfaction levels. And you will get more familiar over time, when you're really paying attention to your body, as to what your body is craving at any given moment. So, for example, I know what my specific craving for protein feels like. I know that in my body I start to feel a little lethargic and I almost get this pit in my stomach. Which over time, I've found based on the data my body has given me, that my body is needing a source of protein. Which I'm then able to provide to it. I also have cravings for fat, carbs, foods that are more crunchy -- all of the things that my body needs to feel that satisfaction from food. Whether that's nutritionally or just because of my own food preferences, right? My body lets me know when it's craving healthy fats. And it let's me know when it's craving something sweet. Because of my personal preferences and tastes with food. With these cravings from the body, nothing about them feels out of control. It's kind of like my body tapping me on the shoulder. Which sounds weird but you get the idea. It's just letting me know, "Hey, this is what we're wanting or needing right now from food. Maybe you can do us a solid, and take care of that. And eat that thing." Basically, these

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cravings never feel like an emergency. And this is the main difference between natural cravings from your body and emotional cravings from your brain.

When a craving is emotional from your brain, it will always feel like an emergency. It's less about what foods you want to intentionally eat, and it's more about "what foods you need right now or you're going to die", right? Or at least that's how your brain feels in that moment. Cravings from the body are more gradual. Cravings from the brain are very instantaneous. As in, it will happen instantly where one moment you felt totally fine. And then the next moment you feel like you need all of the chocolate in the world, right now. We all know what this feels like. So, if cravings from the body were a little tap on the shoulder, cravings from the mind are like a punch to the face. Maybe not that dramatic, but it's much more severe. Your body is letting you know, "I need this right now or else". And, what do we know about the brain? We know that your primitive brain is always seeking comfort and avoiding pain. All of the time. It's always looking for ways to do this. So, what does your brain immediately have available to it when it feels uncomfortable. It's food. When your brain is unwilling to experience an uncomfortable, negative emotion it will produce an intense, instantaneous craving for food. Because your brain is willing to feel that emotion in that moment. Thereby, giving you an intense craving for food that would make you feel better and suppress that emotion. And the more your brain is used to doing this, the more intense those cravings will get. It's literally like a screaming, spoiled toddler, right? You can either not buy your toddler that toy at the store, and have your toddler cry because it's not getting its way. Or you can buy your toddler that toy, thereby providing evidence to your toddler that "Oh. If I cry that's how I will get a toy and feel better". This is what's happening with your brain. Your brain's like, "Oh. When we feel negative emotion, if I produce this craving for food then we'll feel better". And it can either be a single emotion in the moment. Or, when you feel

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like you're experiencing cravings all of the time, it may be because of an emotional void that you're experiencing. So, a single emotion in the moment might be overwhelm, or doubt, or fear. An emotional void that you may experience long-term might be a lack of fulfillment, a lack of connection, or a lack of purpose. But, the point is, the brain produces cravings to escape a negative emotion that it's unwilling to experience. This is very natural for our brains to do this. Because it seeks pleasure and avoids pain, always. This is useful when it comes to keeping us alive. However, it's not so useful when we're trying to change our eating habits and eat healthy intentionally. This right here is why many people will say things like, "I'm just addicted to sugar" or "I'm always craving this food". That's not really the case. This isn't true. It's not why it's happening. Your brain isn't actually craving the specific food, it's feeling the craving on such an intense level. It's craving the emotional comfort you get from that food. Your brain may know that what provides you emotional comfort is chocolate, cake, or other sweets. But it's not really about the food. It's about the fact that your brain knows those foods provide you comfort. And the fact that those foods are comforting isn't a problem. There are foods that we all find comforting. But the problem is when you feel the need to be comforted by those foods all of the time. Because you're having those cravings for them. Something to add, is that you are likely having natural cravings from the body. We all do. And then those natural cravings can become more dramatic with the emotional cravings. So, you may have a natural craving for something crunchy. To feel that natural satisfaction from food. But then, with the emotional craving added onto that, you may feel a craving for not only something crunchy, but something that provides you comfort as well. So maybe that's overeating a bag of chips, right? Instead of opting for something crunchy that more serves you. Maybe eating chips does serve you in the moment, but if it's a craving from your body, you wouldn't feel the need to eat the whole bag. You could just eat a few and get that satisfaction from it. So, I'm really hoping you're able to see

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the difference between these two types of cravings here.

And the biggest problem with cravings, isn't the fact that the cravings are there. It's the fear that we have around these cravings. We think that a craving implies that something has gone wrong. And this isn't the case. Cravings from the body and mind are natural. Even your emotional cravings are natural, right? That's the way our brains work. They naturally seek comfort in food. But the problem I see most, is that when people are having these cravings, they begin fighting them. So they'll try to cover up the cravings and resist them completely. For example, let's say someone has a craving for a piece of chocolate. And this is a very natural craving whether that's from the brain or body. But, instead of having one piece of chocolate and honoring this craving intentionally, they'll opt for some sugar free diet food instead. To try and ignore or cover up the craving. What will usually end up happening here, is they will end up binge eating the food that they're depriving themselves of. So, in this case that's the chocolate. They'll probably end up feeling so out of control that they eat the entire block of it. Or what can happen is they end up overeating the diet food that they've replaced that chocolate with. So, the idea with cravings is never to eliminate them. It's to begin honoring them and respecting them for what they are. Which is a signal from your brain or body as to what it feels like it needs.

The solution to honoring your cravings is to pay attention and check in with your body regularly. Always be asking yourself what your body (or brain for that matter) needs. If you begin craving a particular type of food, eat a small amount of that food and then wait. Give it some time to see if you feel satisfied. And if not, and the craving begins to feel super urgent, then you know it's probably coming from your brain. And it's just your brain's unwillingness to experience an emotion. The key is in knowing that you are the boss of your

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eating habits. You have the power. And your cravings don't have the power. Your primitive brain doesn't have the power. Luckily for us humans, we also have our prefrontal cortex, which is our intentional brain that we can use to make intentional decisions despite how we are feeling emotionally. You get to decide what you make the cravings mean. And how you take action from them. For me, if the craving is that tap on the shoulder from my body, then I'm going to turn around and have a conversation with it. But, if it's that more aggressive craving from my brain, I'm probably just going to tell it, "Not today. We're good here. Everything's fine. We can feel negative emotion." The most important thing to remember is that cravings are simply your brain and body's way of communicating it's needs. And your body is always trying to communicate it's needs to you. So, it's way past time we start listening to it. You can honor your cravings without feeling powerless to them. Your cravings are not the enemy. They are your brain and body telling you what they think you need. And sometimes they can feel like an overbearing friend. But that friend really just wants the best for you. That friend wants to keep you alive. So, always be honest with yourself. Observe your cravings from curiosity. And always be checking in and seeing what type of craving is coming up for you. Whether it's a passive craving from your body, or a more aggressive craving from your mind. You have the ability to make intentional decisions with food, despite what your cravings are telling you. Nothing has gone wrong. Alright, my lovely friend. I hope you have a wonderful and fulfilling rest of your day. And I'll talk to you next week.