

Here are some good ideas for what to substitute when you are craving comfort foods.

If you crave sweets:

Instead of a donut, have a protein bar, but be sure it isn't loaded with fat and sugar. Or have a chocolate protein shakes - some brands are really tasty (Beverly Int'l's muscle provider chocolate is awesome, ON whey's chocolate tastes like chocolate milk, there are lots of different ones out there!)

A cup of cocoa made with unsweetened cocoa and splenda instead of sugar is one of my favorite sweet treats.

Sugar-free jello and sugar-free pudding are also good treats.

A perfectly ripe apple fits the bill, too. And if you crave apple pie, try microwaving cut-up apple in a dish with a little cinnamon and splenda and a little water.

Crave salt?

94% fat-free popcorn is a good source of fiber and satisfies the need to crunch without adding a lot of calories.

Soy nuts are a good salty/crunchy snack.

There are many baked chips on the market now - some are even tasty. Just be sure to watch your portion size and fit it into your daily calorie allowance.

Crave warmth?

Herbal tea comes in more flavors than you could ever list.

General Mills has a sugar-free, decaf French Vanilla Cafe that is good, that satisfies sweet and warm!

A cup of soup, either lowsodium chicken broth or miso is a nice, filling way to get something warm (and salty) in your system.

A bowl of oatmeal is a warm, filling snack too.

Crave pizza?

try making your own, it will be healthier and more nutritious.

Experiment with different crusts - whole wheat tortillas, low-carb tortillas, whole wheat english muffins, whole wheat pita bread or homemade whole wheat crust.

Look for lowfat mozzarella or soy mozzarella, and lowfat versions of sausage or soy crumbles.

Load your pizza with veggies that you like, mushrooms, onions, garlic, broccoli, spinach,

whatever you like.

The following tips might help when the cookie jar is calling your name:

1) Chew gum

Fitness model Kristia Knowles and NPC fitness competitor Alissa Carpio both rely on sugarless gum to help keep cravings at bay. "I find that peppermint and cinnamon help stave off the sugar cravings," says Kristia. Alissa's favorite flavors include sugarless Bubble Yum in wild strawberry and peppermint.

2) Follow the 'prevent defense'

You don't have to be perfect all of the time. "I try to prevent cravings from happening, and I do this by allowing myself a cheat day every Saturday and an occasional cheat meal during my precontest dieting," says Alissa. "Controlled cheats are far better than spontaneous splurges."

3) Figure it out

When figure pro Monica Brant is battling a craving, she tries to figure out the cause. She asks herself "Do I need food? Have I not eaten enough?" She finds when cravings hit at night, it's usually because she is tired and what she really needs is sleep. Appetite is different from hunger - hunger is a physical need for food, while appetite tells you what you're in the mood for. Cravings most often stem from appetite, not hunger, so your solution doesn't need to involve food. At least if you understand where your cravings come from, you can help fight it without resorting to Cheetos.

4) Take a shower (or a nap...or a walk)

Change your environment and do something relaxing and positive for yourself. You might be surprised at how quickly the craving evaporates.

5) Give your sweet tooth a healthier alternative

If Monica's mental strategies aren't enough to quiet her cravings, she'll snack on nuts such as almonds or have a Doctor's CarbRite Diet bar. Alissa eats low sugar protein bars, too, and has sugar-free jam on rice cakes to satisfy her sweet tooth. "I also drink diet coke and black coffee to overcome my urge for sweets as well as to control my appetite," says Alissa. Remember that thirst can masquerade as hunger, so before you splurge on ice cream, have a glass of Crystal Light or some other sugar-free drink.

6) Supply feeds the demand..so lose the supply

Get those trigger foods out of there, if your home environment permits. Hubby loves ice cream but it's a trigger for you? Stock the freezer with a flavor he loves but you can safely pass up. If kids or guests make it necessary for you to have chips/crackers/cookies in the house, try buying mini-size bags so portions are controlled if you have the urge to splurge.

## 7) Set yourself up for success

Common sense tells you that the more restrictive your diet, the more likely you'll binge in rebellion. Eating protein, carbs and healthy fat throughout the day in moderate proportions will go a long way to curb those cravings. If you love crunchy, salty snacks, include some mini-ricecakes or Smart pop popcorn as a snack. If the sweet stuff's your downfall, throw some berries into your protein shake or include low-sugar jam in your diet.

## 8) Consider the real deal

Sugar-free ice cream with fat-free Hershey's syrup might not cut it for you. If you still look for something sweet after eating low-sugar, low-fat foods, try the real thing instead. A few spoonfuls of the gourmet full-fat stuff might provide more satisfaction than a cup of fat-free. As long as you can control the portion, you can still limit your splurge to fewer than 300 calories and enjoy every bite.

## 9) Get right back on track

Both Kristia and Alissa will have a small portion of what they really want if the craving hasn't diminished after they've emptied their bag of tricks. Sometimes that's the best way to keep your sanity. As Alissa explains: "I don't beat myself up if I do give in to a craving. It's better to accept it and get right back on your diet the following day. Living a fit and healthy lifestyle should include eating a variety of your favorite foods. You'll be more likely to stick to the diet and enjoy yourself along the way if you do."

Article from Muscle & Fitness Hers

## Crunchy Snack Ideas

Do you miss the sensation of biting into a crunchy snack? Are reduced-fat cheese sticks and nonfat or low-fat yogurt not getting the job done? Good news: Nuts are not your only crunchy snack option. Here are a few more healthy choices to fulfill your need for a crispy crunch.

### Phase 1:

Veggie sticks, including celery, green peppers, cauliflower buds, broccoli florets, and asparagus spears (unlimited)

Dill pickles, no-sugar added (unlimited - unless you're watching your sodium intake)

Edamame (1 serving = 1/4 cup)

Roasted chickpeas (1 serving = 1/3 to 1/2 cup)

Sunflower seeds (1 serving = 3 tablespoons or 1 ounce)

### Phase 2:

Carrot sticks

Whole-wheat crackers (Wasa or reduced-fat Triscuits - refer to label for serving size)

(South beach diet)