

# Craving or Hunger?

Hunger is a physical need to eat.

Cravings are temptations or intense urges to eat for another reason. However, the difference between hunger and cravings isn't always clear-cut.

Our minds can do a good job of convincing us it's time to eat.

*Cravings are complex, individual and occur for many reasons.*

Test your knowledge to see how in tune you are with your hunger signals. How might you react in the same situation?

		Hunger	Craving
1	You have eaten your evening meal, but still want pudding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2	You go for coffee with your friend, see the cakes on the counter and order a slice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3	You are always hungry at certain times of the day.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4	You get home from work feeling lightheaded and dizzy as you didn't get a lunch break.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5	You stop at the fuel station on your way home. As you wait to pay you grab a bag of crisps and some sweets.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6	Your stomach is rumbling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7	You feel shaky, you've been busy all day and haven't thought to eat.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8	You are having dinner with your partner in the evening, so you find yourself eating the children's leftovers earlier on.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9	You're watching TV in the evening and feel the need to grab the crisps from the cupboard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10	Pastries and biscuits are available at your morning meeting, you can't resist.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Now read on for answers to these situations with hints and tips on how to manage them.

1 *You have eaten your evening meal, but still want pudding.*

**Craving or hunger.** If you've eaten a large meal and feel full then the desire for something sweet is probably a craving. In this situation delay the desire to eat for 15-20 minutes. This time allows your main meal to settle (useful if you've eaten quickly) and allows you to think and decide whether to act on the urge to eat. It could be hunger if your meal was small. In which case eating pudding could be another opportunity to refuel, especially if you choose foods that nourish your body.

2 *You go for coffee with your friend, see the cakes on the counter and order a slice.*

**Craving.** Most likely a craving if you'd only planned on having a coffee. Seeing the cake has been the 'trigger' to want to eat. It could also be association whereby going for coffee equals eating cake. Depending on how often this happens it can become a learned behaviour. In this situation it can help to accept and give permission to yourself that you will have cake so you don't feel that you are missing out. Alternatively, delay the decision for 15-20 minutes to see if it's actually what you want. You could opt to share a piece with your friend.

3 *You are always hungry at certain times of the day.* **Craving or hunger.**

If you have regular meals then it is normal to feel hungry just before a meal. If you skip meals, such as breakfast, then you may be hungry by mid-morning. At this time you may 'crave' sugary or fatty foods because you've not provided your body with a regular supply of energy.

4 *You get home from work feeling lightheaded and dizzy as you didn't get a lunch break.* **Hunger.**

Your body, including your brain, need a regular supply of energy throughout the day. Regular meals and nourishing snacks can help with this. When low on energy we can feel tired, lethargic, lightheaded, dizzy, nauseous and irritable. Don't forget to drink plenty of fluid during the day too, as dehydration can lead to similar symptoms.

5 *You stop at the fuel station on your way home. As you wait to pay you grab a bag of crisps and some sweets. **Craving.***

This is a type of external trigger. Seeing the snacks, makes you want them, even though you might not have been thinking about food. Try paying at the pump to avoid this situation. Do check to see if you've eaten regularly during the day and not actually hungry. Consider checking in with how you feel, are you using food to make a bad or stressful day seem better?

6 *Your stomach is rumbling. **Hunger.***

A rumbling stomach is a natural and physical sign that your body is ready for its next meal or a planned snack. This feeling often progresses if left.

7 *You feel shaky, you've been busy all day and haven't thought to eat. **Hunger.***

This is a normal physical sign that the body needs some fuel. Either you've missed a meal, or your next meal is due. Regular meals can help prevent you feeling like this.

8 *You are having dinner with your partner in the evening, so you find yourself eating the children's leftovers earlier on. **Hunger or craving.***

It might have been a long time since lunch and by eating later, you're hungry at 5pm when the children eat. Plan your own snack to eat whilst they eat their food. This way you'll be less likely to finish theirs and feel more in control of your food intake. If you have eaten regularly with meals and snacks, then just being around food and seeing the children eat is the trigger. Try pausing to see what you're really feeling. This will help you decide if and what you eat.

9 *You're watching TV in the evening and feel the need to grab the crisps from the cupboard. **Craving.***

This assumes you've eaten your meal and eaten regularly during the day. Eating in the evening can be habit, a way of managing stress and unwinding after the day. If you're drinking alcohol this may well increase the urge to eat too.

10 *Pastries and biscuits are available at your morning meeting, you can't resist.*

**Craving or hunger.** Seeing the foods will trigger a desire to want to eat them. Delaying your choice to eat can help you work out if you really want to. In this situation, you could take your own, planned snack, to eat at the meeting or just before. It could be hunger driving the craving, especially if you've skipped breakfast.