

# Why is Junk Food so Tempting?

*Processed food, rich in sugar, salt and fat, fails to send the right signal to our brains, and makes us overeat*

BY VIJAY THAKKAR



**W**hen was the last time you stopped yourself from having another scoop of your favourite ice cream, an extra potato chip or an additional cookie? Isn't it puzzling how we can endlessly keep eating our favourite food items, which add pounds of fat even before we know it?

The science behind nutrition explains our ability to control our appetite towards food and our unstoppable desire to eat junk food. We stop eating junk food either when we are out of stock or when our conscience tells us that we've had enough. The food that we eat, through various hormones and enzymes, triggers psychological pathways that tell us to either keep eating or to stop because the body has received enough nutrition. Hence,

## TRICK OR TREAT?

FOOD THAT TRICKS OUR BRAINS INTO OVEREATING	FOOD THAT SENDS ACCURATE SATIETY SIGNALS
Seed oils	Vegetables & nuts
Alcohol	Eggs & meat
Sugar	Pulses & whole grain
Artificial non-caloric sweeteners	Seafood

food that gives the right signals to our brain does not let us overeat.

Food items, when consumed in their natural and unprocessed form, promote healthy psychological and hormonal responses, support digestive and immune systems, and minimise inflammation of organs, capillaries and joints. Our body and brain have an effective mechanism to process information about consumption of food found in its natural form. Our tongue and palate have also identified taste signals to judge the food's potential in strengthening or

weakening our health. Because of this, our brain is hardwired to identify three basic tastes: Fatty (a dense source of energy), sweet (a quick source of energy), and salty (facilitates conservation of body fluids).

Whenever we have food with these tastes, the neurotransmitters release signals of reward and pleasure that get stored in our memories associated with that food item. Unfortunately, they are released because of the flavour of the food and not its nutritional value.

So while our bodies are tuned to send accurate satiety signals about the food we eat, processed food hijacks our neurotransmitters and, so, our bodies cannot judge the quantity we are consuming. For example, when grains like rice and wheat are refined, their fibre, protein, vitamins, minerals and fat content is lost, leaving them rich in sugar, but poor in nutrition. Hence, the brain is hijacked into thinking that the body has not consumed sufficient calories due to lack of nourishment, and thus it does not release the satiety signal to indicate a halt. This is aggravated by the fact that the individual has identified this sweet taste as a pleasurable experience. Hence, the neurotransmitters activate the reward centres in the brain, reinforcing a habitual consumption of this food item.

Therefore, it is crucial to identify and minimise the consumption of food items that trick our brain into overeating. **1**

*The writer is founder and CEO of 48 Fitness*

