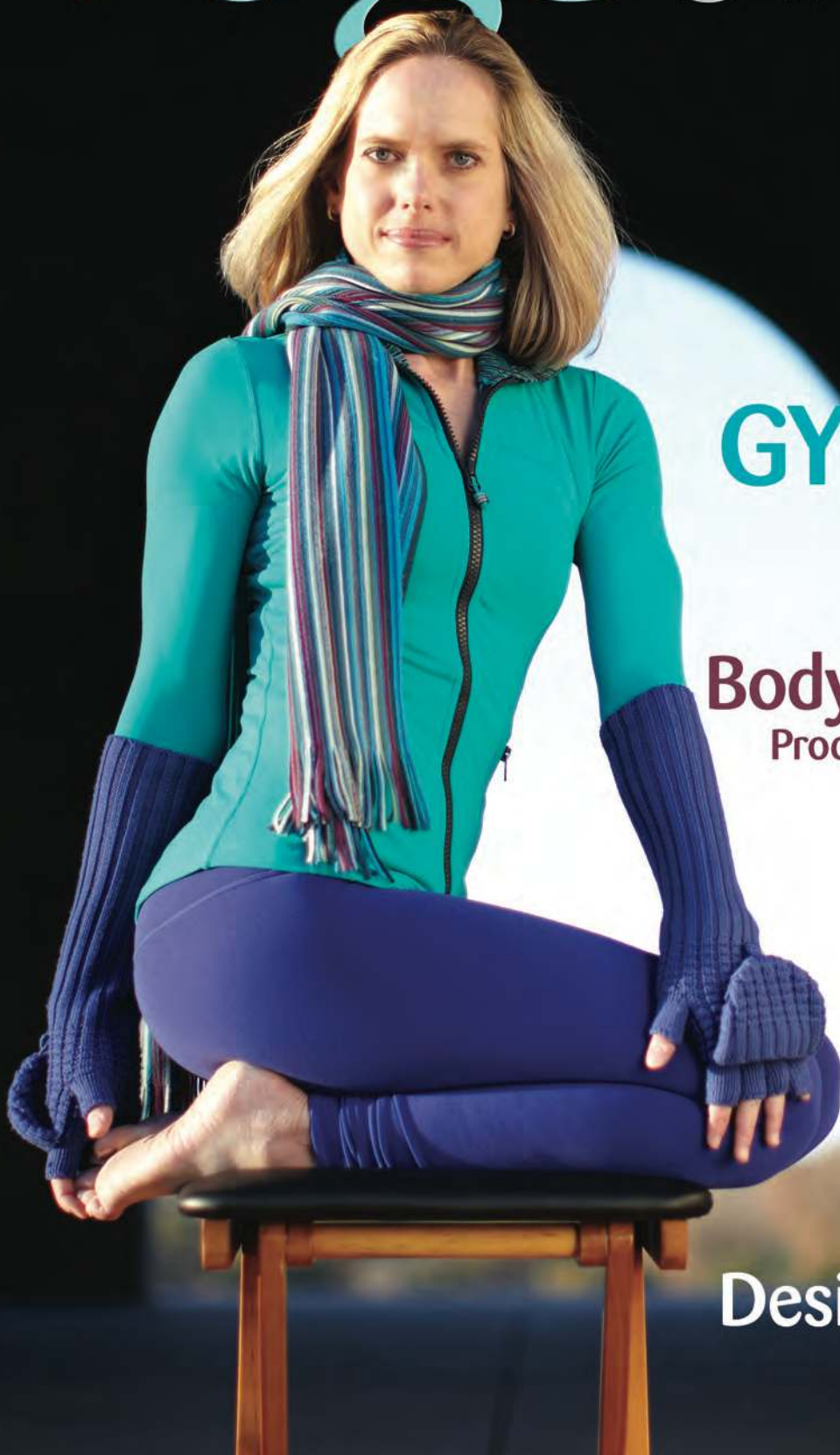


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Healthy Comfort Foods

by Maya F. Bradstreet

Craving Comfort Foods? A Guiltless Snack Attack

The first of January draws the line in the sand for many of us. We leave behind the old year, the stresses of the holidays, and perhaps the bulge(s) that came along with them. While New Year's Resolutions run the gamut from financial goals to spiritual intentions, it's safe to say that food and fitness make up the most significant percentage. Early winter means good business for gyms and yoga studios, with sweaty, determined folks working to burn off the pounds. Diet-wise, our society as a whole becomes even more calorie, fat and portion-size obsessed.

Despite all of these well-meaning intentions, more often than not, we end up having a relapse. By March, or perhaps even February, we've reverted back to the same-old, same-old. Our familiar behaviors, patterns, and thoughts are hard to kick to the curb, plain and simple. Without a support group, someone, or something to keep you accountable, it's easy to lose the motivation. Especially in the colder winter months, it's hard to choose 'healthy' when we naturally crave 'comfort'. So, how do we safely navigate the waters of those cravings when we're trying to be so 'good'?

Cravings

First things first, we need to stop associating 'good' with 'deprivation' and 'bad' with succumbing to cravings. This is a huge departure from how things are seen in our culture, where somehow, seeking comfort from food is seen as a weakness. If we decide to look at this from another perspective, we as eaters and human beings can have more power and control.

A craving, simply put, is a desire to have something the body lacks. It is a very important signal. The body is talking to you, shouting in fact: 'pay attention to me!' Sometimes, the craving indicates that we need more of an important nutrient. Such as during pregnancy or the blood sugar roller coaster that causes you to crack open a Mountain Dew at 3:00.

Sometimes a craving is less physical in nature. Perhaps it is our soul that is lacking something, nutrients better known as love, support, and fulfillment. If we're not getting those nutrients daily, of course we're going to reach towards comfort food. Oftentimes when demystifying cravings with clients, we find that specific foods are associated with a time in our lives when we had a large supply of that missing 'nutrient'.

So now that we know cravings have a purpose, we shouldn't turn our backs on them. Rather, use them as a tool to get in tune with yourself and nourish yourself appropriately. Here are some tips to get you started.

Tips for Handling Snack Attacks

When (not if!) it strikes, be prepared to deal with your craving. By having a plan, you'll be able to tackle it in a healthy way without sabotaging your health or your goals.

• **Be gentle with yourself:** if making a New Year's resolution that is diet-related, make the decision to take baby steps, rather than doing something all-or-nothing. Also, give yourself the ability to make mistakes. This way you can avoid the guilt if you aren't able to keep up with the high demands.

• **Experiment with new ways of eating:** If you're prone to predictable energy slumps or if you rely on sugar and caffeine, perhaps you need to look at how you can alter your diet and avoid these pitfalls. There are as many dietary theories as there are minutes in a year, but you can try some of the following suggestions that are supported by several diets:

- Eat a protein with every meal
- Eat a substantial breakfast
- Eat more frequently throughout the day
- Reduce your intake of caffeine and sugar
- Have a fruit or vegetable with every meal

• **Drink water:** We are a chronically dehydrated society. If you are hungry, you may very well just be thirsty. Drink a nice big cup of water with some lemon juice before giving in to your craving, see if that doesn't make it go away. That said...

• **Demystify your craving:** Rather than mindlessly 'giving in' and snarfing down that candy bar, begin to pay attention to the qualities of what it is that you're craving. In terms of flavor, do you prefer salty popcorn or the sweetness of a baked good? With texture, is it crunchy chips or smooth chocolate that is the winner? Even with temperature, do you reach for an ice-cold popsicle (or pint!), or a piping hot chocolate when settling in for the night?

• **Give yourself some of what you're craving:** When you disregard your craving, you may end up having a worse one later on, that you simply cannot avoid. So it's actually OK to give in to what it is that your body/mind/soul needs, but in a more 'natural', 'healthy' form. When craving something sweet try dark chocolate, dried fruit or whole fruit. Sweet vegetables like carrots, sweet potato, squash will also satisfy a sweet tooth. Use natural sweeteners like agave, honey, rice syrup or date sugar as substitutes for sugar or artificial sweeteners. When having a salty craving try aged cheeses or dry roasted salted nuts rather than potato chips or french fries. Celery, beets, kale and seaweeds are tasty salty veggies. Add more natural sea salt or soy sauce to your food throughout the day. Craving crunchy? Munch on rice cakes, raw veggies, crisp apples or granola and trail mix.

One last word about resolutions, despite the cynical picture I painted at the beginning, I do want to encourage you to set goals, to listen to your intentions, to dream big. What you think and set your mind to when it comes to diet IS possible. By having the right support the internal drive to making your resolution can become a reality!

“COCOA-NUT” TRUFFLES (see photo)

This recipe is such a versatile, wholesome treat that will give you a lift and pack a nutritional punch along with it. No guilt here! Switch out the nuts depending on what's in your pantry; walnuts are great for Omega 3's, but you can really use whatever your taste buds prefer. The dates and natural sweeteners will give you energy, but it'll be mediated by the fiber and protein from the nuts and coconut. Lastly, those touches of raw cocoa will give you an energy rush from the naturally-occurring alkaloids and minerals.

2 cups raw nuts walnuts

- 1 cup dates
- ½ cup shredded unsweetened coconut
- 2 tbsp raw cocoa powder or cacao nibs
- dash of sea salt
- 1-3 tbsp raw honey or agave nectar

Process all ingredients until they are sticky enough to form into balls. Add more honey/agave if mixture is too dry or you desire more sweetness. Refrigerating them 15 minutes to overnight makes them easier to handle. Roll into balls. Dust with coconut if desired, by placing additional shredded coconut into Ziploc bag along with balls. Toss to coat. Y&S

Maya F. Bradstreet, MS HHC founded A Recipe for Wellness, LLC as a way to inspire & promote well-being in others through food choices. She teaches cooking classes and leads seminars in a variety of settings throughout the St. Louis Area, and works privately with clients regarding nutrition. A graduate of Brown University, she received her food and nutrition training at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition in New York City, and a Masters degree in Health Promotion from Indiana University. She is a holistic health coach certified by the American Association of Drugless Practitioners. You can contact her with any food and health-related questions at maya@arecipe4wellness.com.



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