

Sweet cravings can be body's stress response

By Erin Beresini, Outside

Researchers have fingered several things as sources of sweet cravings. Stress, caffeine, and lack of sleep can all over stimulate your HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal) axis, the body's stress response system. Researchers believe chronic overstimulation of that HPA axis can impair its function, leading to poor immune activity, memory, and metabolism.

Calorie-dense food like sweets, researchers believe, stimulate the body's endogenous opioid system, which releases endorphins and has a pain-relieving, analgesic effect on the body. It may also help decrease the activity of the HPA axis, helping to calm that overstimulation. If you're constantly craving sweets, it could be your body's way of telling you to chill out, get more sleep, or cut the caffeine.

Of course, there are other reasons why you may crave sweets, particularly right after a meal when you're presumably full. A poorly fueled workout is one of them.

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