

Why are salt, sugar and fat so addictive?

By vegan naturopath Robyn Chuter.

In [last week's post](#), I introduced you to John and Ashleigh, who both struggle with food cravings when they become anxious. As I pointed out in that post, ["It's not about the food"](#), *many people overeat, or eat when they're not genuinely hungry, to quell uncomfortable feelings*. But why is it that, as John humorously pointed out, eating broccoli doesn't have the same anxiety-relieving effect as his 'frug' (food-drug), freshly-baked bread with butter, Swiss cheese and avocado?

The answer largely lies in 3 components of processed food that drive cravings like nothing else: salt, sugar and fat. In his book *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us*, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter Michael Moss (whom you can watch in this [interview](#)) details how the processed food industry uses prodigious amounts of salt, sugar and fat in foods and beverages, very intentionally and unabashedly, to addict consumers.

Adding sugar, salt and fat to food makes perfect sense from the point of the food industry: these ingredients drive overconsumption of the foods and beverages they're added to; and they're cheap and readily available, which maximises profit.

The food industry employs scientists to study, in great detail, the way that the unholy trinity of salt, sugar and fat affects brain function in humans.

For example, food technologists do extensive scientific studies on products before they're launched, searching for the exact concentration of sugar that will hit what the industry calls the **"bliss point"** – the maximum amount of activation of

the brain's pleasure centre. They have also altered the chemical structure of sugar, and add enhancers to it that amplify its sweetness 200 times.

Food industry scientists also use brain imaging and other advanced sophisticated neurological assessment tools to study the impact of fat on the pleasure centre in the brain. Using the results of these studies, food technologists then manipulate the chemical structure of the fats they add to processed food, to enhance their *"mouthfeel"* – the warm, melt-in-the-mouth sensation you get when you bite into a cheese-stuffed pizza crust, or a piece of chocolate.

The food industry also manipulates the physical structure of salt, pulverising it to a fine powder so that it hits your palate faster and harder to provide what they call *"the flavour burst"* – that tingling sensation you get when you put a potato chip in your mouth, which is way much more intense than the potato chips from my childhood. Again, this flavour burst sends signals directly to the pleasure centre in the brain.

In summary, the irresistibility of foods rich in salt, sugar and fat stems from the impact they have on the regions of our brain that register pleasure. But why would we be craving the pleasure of eating – which is very transitory, and suffers from the law of diminishing returns: the first couple of mouthfuls are always the best – to this intense and self-destructive degree? For most people, when they really drill down into it, the answer to that question is "Because I'm not happy!"

When I work with a client, or with participants in [*The LEAN Program*](#), I'm always looking for the thoughts, beliefs and past experiences that limit that individual's ability to experience happiness. Once I find that happiness-blocker, I get to work with EFT to root it out... and then something magical happens: there's a spontaneous outbreak of happiness!

Everything in that person's life that *could* be a source of happiness – their relationships, the beauty in their physical environment that's just waiting to be noticed, the obstacles they've overcome and the personal growth they've achieved – suddenly becomes evident to them. And then the mindless pursuit of food-borne pleasure just drops away. Who needs to drug themselves with food when they're already high on happiness?

As a client said to me many years ago, when you finally find something in life that's bigger than the chocolate cake, the craving just falls away.