

Does It Work? Craving Crushers

BY ERICA SLOAN

Fact: We eat when we're hungry—and even when we're not. One reason is that over time, we develop cravings for sugary and fatty foods because they activate the brain's reward circuitry, making us feel happy and satisfied, says Eric Stice, Ph.D., clinical psychologist and senior research scientist at the Oregon Research Institute. Of course, junk food and excess calories from any source don't do our health any favors. Enter products that claim to address our extracurricular longings for food. Here, the skinny on what's worth trying.

OVEREATING BUSTERS

WHAT THEY ARE: It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to register that your belly is full; there are two items that may get you through that time without overeating. One is a lozenge, to be popped after a meal; it's sweet, then morphs into a minty, tingly sensation that is

meant to distract you until your natural satiety kicks in. Another is an injectible prescription medication that stimulates hormones in your gut that are related to satiety and digestion.

WHAT TO KNOW: In one small study, people who used the lozenge reduced caloric intake by 12%. In various other research, 60% to 80% of those who used the Rx drug dropped 5% of their body weight.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? The lozenge has potential, but a hard candy or a mint could have the same effect, says Angela Fitch, M.D., medical director of the UC Health Weight Loss Center at the University of Cincinnati. The medication, called liraglutide, has side effects (such as gallstones) that need to be weighed against the weight loss benefits.

BRANDS: MealEnders lozenges (\$17). Talk to your doctor about Saxenda, the brand name for liraglutide; not all insurance covers it, so you may wind up having to shell out up to \$1,500 for 30 days' worth.



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SNACKING STOPPERS

WHAT THEY ARE: They contain extracts that are said to help you resist the munchies by altering the digestive process and targeting hormones that affect appetite.

WHAT TO KNOW: Spinach extract may delay fat digestion; in a small study, a 5 g dose increased satiety over two hours. Twice-daily saffron-extract capsules made people snack less often in another study, possibly by regulating serotonin, a hormone that impacts appetite and mood.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Maybe. They probably won't harm you, but they might not help, says Dr. Fitch. The studies are too small to provide definitive results.

BRANDS: Appethyl pure spinach extract (about \$15) or saffron-extract capsules (\$10 to \$20). Flat Tummy Tea Co. lollipops (\$29) contain saffron extract.

SUGAR BLOCKERS

WHAT THEY ARE:

Sugar prompts the release of feel-good hormone dopamine in the brain. Habitually eating sweet treats causes the brain to activate the same response

when you're exposed to related stimuli (e.g., the place you usually eat them), which brings on cravings, says Stice. Products with *gymnema sylvestre* leaf extract claim to stop that cycle by blocking sweetness receptors on the tongue via a mouth spray or a lozenge. You don't enjoy the sweets, and so find them easier to put aside.

WHAT TO KNOW: In Stice's study, funded by a lozenge manufacturer, a gymnemic lozenge helped people eat 44% less candy than those given a placebo mint.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Yes. "Gymnema can reduce sugar intake; then you become less sensitive to it and your brain craves it less," says Stice.

BRANDS: Sweet Defeat (\$30) and Seynani Sugar Blocker oral spray (\$22).