

## Connection, Distraction, Stress, or Treat? The Hidden Clues in Candy Bowls

As you're walking through the office, you notice a bowl of small candies on a coworker's desk, so you eat a few pieces and chat for a few minutes. It seems innocuous. Then, do you ever notice yourself making a point of walking that direction for the candy, or perhaps being annoyed when the candy bowl is empty? I know I have.

Studies consistently show Americans eat an excess of sugar. You probably know many of the negative consequences eating too much can have on your health including: tooth decay, blood sugar imbalances, headaches, mood swings, vision problems, poor concentration, weight gain, increased acidity in the body (which lowers resistance to illness), hypoglycemia, and diabetes.

If you don't eat much other sugar, then your body can handle a few pieces of candy here and there without too much harm. However, consuming other sources of sugar (e.g. sodas, desserts, fruit juices, and high fructose corn syrup hidden in many products), compounds the problem. Between Halloween and New Year's Day, the treats appear like magic in the office.

If you use willpower to suppress the urge, you'll probably just feel more resentful and irritated if you don't eat it. And if you do eat it, you may feel guilty, neither of which leads to long-term sustainable change in behavior.

### What's Going On?

So, let's take a different approach. Let's use it as an opportunity to find out what's really going on. When you see yourself reaching for candy or other treats sitting around the office, stop. **Ask yourself, "What's going on? Why do I want this?"** Here's a list of reasons one group of employees came up with:



- Bored with what I'm doing
- Tired and looking for an energy boost
- Happy or relieved about something- a reward
- (Alternatively) unhappy, anxious, frustrated, or upset about something- a comfort, consolation, or treat (like when doctors give kids a sucker after a shot)
- Hungry- skipped lunch or didn't eat enough protein (When you're stressed, you need more protein.)
- Dehydrated- (Many people confuse hunger with thirst.)
- Mid-afternoon slump
- Connect socially with others
- Habit or emotional association: "It's the holidays."
- "I don't even like that candy, but it's there." (The candy makers' marketing and packaging strategy has been successful.)

There are many different reasons, and your reason for eating could vary based on the day. **When you become more aware about *why* you want the candy rather than just unconsciously or habitually eating it, you have power to make other choices to address the *real* issue.** For example, if you're tired, eating candy won't resolve the underlying issue. That's like adding gas to a car that needs air in the tires.

### What Do You Want?

The next step is to clarify what you want, which may be something like, "to be healthy and strong, take great care of myself, be in great shape, and/or have the energy to do what I want." **What do you want?**

## What Can You Do?

If the choice is all or nothing, many encounter the guilt, inner resistance, or resentment mentioned earlier. Instead, consider smaller steps you could take to move you closer to what you want.

Remember MacGyver? Just as MacGyver looks for solutions within his reach, think about what you can do right then to address the real issue. *"Ok, I've got this craving for candy, but I'm really \_\_\_\_\_ (tired, frustrated, anxious, or hungry), so I could . . . "* **What could you do?**

Depending on the issue, here are some ideas to get you started:

- Pause for a minute to do some deep breathing and stretch to increase circulation and alertness.
- Do something you enjoy to shift your attitude. Sometimes a craving for sweets is actually a craving for the sweetness of life. If you've been focused on work or dealing with a tough challenge, you may need to take a few minutes to refocus on yourself, so go outside for a walk, visit with a friend or coworker, draw, listen to music, or do something else that delights you.
- Drink a glass of water to stay hydrated, clear your thinking, and support your body in flushing away sugar and other toxins.
- Eat something else first- such as a piece of fruit, a handful of raw nuts or a protein bar.
- Upgrade the quality of what you eat, such as organic dark chocolate. Yes, it's more expensive, but it has some health benefits, and often people find it takes less to feel satisfied.
- Talk with coworkers about it. Ask them to hide the bowl when they see you coming.

What else could you do? Start with what you *can* do. When you take small steps like these, you develop more awareness and interrupt the pattern, which is a good thing. Then, if you still want the candy, eat a small piece and savor it. (Kids know how to do this.)

If you get stuck, work with a nutritionist, acupuncturist, or other health practitioner to learn more about what your body needs, get support in diet changes, and eliminate cravings. This was one of the best investments I made in myself. (Call or email me if you want more information or suggestions.)

## What if you've got the candy?

What if you're the one with the candy bowl sitting out? When I've asked employees about it, here are some of their comments:

*"Oh, I don't eat it. I pick candy I don't like."* (If you don't want it, why do you want other people to eat it?)

*"I like people stopping by and chatting."* (Perhaps it gives them a chance to look up from the computer and take short break to connect with others. Or, maybe they're bored or don't have enough to do.)

*"It's not Halloween without candy."* (Or Christmas, or Valentine's Day, or Easter . . . Again, the candy makers' marketing strategy has worked.)

*"It was leftover from Halloween, and I didn't want to waste it."* (So we'll all "waist" it?)

*"I wouldn't see my boss if I didn't have a candy bowl."* (Do you think the boss realizes he's being baited?)

There are clues in these comments, and it's valuable to understand why you have the candy before you just get rid of it. Do you want to socially connect with coworkers, nurture or feed others, distract yourself from work, or is it just an unconscious habit that hasn't been questioned?

Knowing the negative impact excessive sugar has on people's health and productivity, would you like to find some other ways to fulfill your needs and also benefit your coworkers? I thought so!

- Don't buy the cheapest candy, which is loaded with sugar. Opt for dark chocolate or other healthier candies from the health food store. Sure, it's more expensive, which means you'll probably buy less.
- Avoid artificial sweeteners, such as aspartame, which have other health downsides.
- Set the bowl out only one day a week.
- If you enjoy people stopping by, add trail mix, raw nuts (walnuts, pecans, or almonds) to a jar so coworkers can pour a small handful and even get some nutrition. Or, instead of candy, set out a bowl of clementine oranges at this time of year to satisfy the passing sweet tooth.
- Want to get completely away from food? Set out a bottle of Rescue Remedy or aromatherapy spray for stressed coworkers.
- Set out a deck of affirmation cards with inspiring messages or quotes, so coworkers can pick a card for the day. See if it sparks more positive conversations and fulfills your need for social connection without spending money constantly refilling the bowl.
- Go for a short walk around the office to take a short break and connect with others.

The whole point is to work in ways that are healthy, productive, and satisfying, so you have the energy and enthusiasm to do the things you want-- and to support your coworkers in doing the same. So, let's start creating healthier traditions at work, one small step at a time.

Live well,  
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