Can’t resist the chips...cookies...ice cream? It’s normal to feel out of control: Processed foods are designed to make us overeat. Here’s how it works – and what to do about it.

**MARKETING TRICKS MAKE PROCESSED FOODS SEEM “GOOD FOR YOU”**

Bright colors, cartoon characters, and celebrities form positive associations.

Phrases like ‘take a break’ and ‘You’re worth it’ tap into our need for self care.

Buzzwords like ‘organic’, ‘vegan’, and ‘gluten-free’ create the illusion of health.
In reality, often there is very little nutritional difference between the organic treat and the conventional one.

**Nutrition Facts**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serving Size: 2 pieces</th>
<th>Calories: 220</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Fiber: 1g</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sugars: 16g</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protein: 5g</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein: 5g</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**BIG PORTIONS CONVINCE US WE’RE GETTING A “GOOD DEAL”**

With processed foods, you’re often getting more volume (and more calories). Who doesn’t want more for less?

**VARIETY MAKES US WANT MORE**

When we have lots of different tastes to choose from, we have lots of appetite. And when it comes to processed foods, the options seem endless.
Long ago, humans prioritized calorie-dense foods to help them survive. Today, manufacturers use calorie density to create hyperpalatable (and easily accessible) junk food.

**The anatomy of an irresistible bite**

**Stimuli Stacking**
Sugar, fat, and salt aren’t that appealing on their own. But combined in the form of a treat (like a salted caramel brownie) they’re irresistible.

**The Big Five**
To make it to mass market, processed foods must be:

1. Calorie-dense, usually high in sugar and/or fat
2. Intensely flavored
3. Immediately delicious, love-at-first-bite
4. Melted down easily — the food almost dissolves in your mouth
5. Easy to eat — no effortful chewing needed!

*One major restaurant chain actually injects chicken with sauce to flavor and tenderize it so it requires less chewing!*
Now that you know how deliciousness gets manufactured, use these strategies to build awareness of your behavior and control treat consumption.

7 WAYS TO STOP OVEREATING JUNK FOOD

1. NOTICE YOUR CHEWING

It's easier to overeat when food is easy to chew. A fun experiment: Compare how many chews it takes to swallow processed vs. whole foods.

Also consider:
• How long it takes to eat each food
• How satiated you feel afterwards
• How much you want to keep eating

PROCESSED FOODS
~10 chews

WHOLE FOODS
~25 chews

2. EVALUATE YOUR PANTRY

To change the way you grocery shop and eat, first become aware of what kinds of food you buy – and why you buy them.

• How many junk foods marketed as “health foods” can you find?
• How many celebrity endorsements do you see?
• What self-care promises do you find?
• List the number of treat foods you have in your kitchen.
Habits are powerful, for better or worse. When we have a habit of using food for reasons other than physical hunger, it can lead to overeating.

First, identify your triggers
A trigger can be a...

- Feeling
- Time of day
- Social setting
- Place
- Thought pattern

It’s been a rough day, I deserve this.
When you have the urge to overeat, ask yourself:

- What am I feeling?
- What time is it?
- Who am I with?
- Where am I?
- What thoughts am I having?

This self-knowledge will help you prevent triggered eating in the future.

**Find Feel-Good Habits That Support Your Goals**

Once you know your triggers, disrupt the cycle of trigger > eat > reward by replacing eating with an activity that supports your goals.

**Most effective stress relievers:**

- Exercising and playing sports
- Reading
- Listening to music
- Praying or attending a religious service
- Spending time with friends and family
- Getting a massage
- Walking outside
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Creative hobbies

These habits boost neurotransmitters like serotonin, GABA, and oxytocin, which calm down the stress response and induce a feeling of wellbeing.
Whole foods provide high quality nutrition, and you only pay once!

Processed foods use cheap ingredients, making it possible to sell large quantities at a low price.

Jumbo sizes might seem like a deal because they offer high quantity, but eventually you may pay a “health tax” in the form of fat gain, metabolic problems, and poor health.

Use the “traffic light” system to put quality first

Make your own list of red, yellow, and green light foods.
If changing the foods you eat freaks you out, allow yourself to eat whatever you want, but slowly and mindfully.

“Red” foods are “no-gos” that you tend to overeat, make you feel sick, or don’t help you meet your goals.

“Yellow” foods aren’t the worst choices, but if you eat too much of them you might have regrets.

“Green” foods are nutritious and make your body and mind feel good. Eat these whenever you want.

Your list may be unique to you – i.e. chocolate chip cookies might be “red” for you, but “green” for your friend.

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SLOW DOWN

If changing the foods you eat freaks you out, allow yourself to eat whatever you want, but slowly and mindfully.

✔ Sit at a table and use real dishes.
✔ Eat in a calm environment with no distractions.
✔ Put your utensils down between bites.
Self-criticism and crash dieting may work in the short term, but they usually sabotage your goals in the long term. Approach your overeating with:

- **HONESTY**: How are you really behaving around food? The more accurate you are at perceiving yourself, the better you can support yourself to change.
- **KINDNESS**: Work with yourself instead of against yourself.
- **CURIOSITY**: Explore your habits with openness and interest, not criticism.

Set aside at least 20 minutes per meal. Choose whole, fiber-rich foods that take time to chew. Eat to 80 percent full.

For the full article explaining this infographic, visit: https://www.precisionnutrition.com/why-you-can’t-stop-overeating