

Sniff before you eat

Many of us work longer and harder hours this time of year. We have more things to do because of the holidays and family gatherings. The stress builds and many of us begin to eat ... more.

What is it that makes us eat so much during the holidays? I believe it is two things:

❶ The wrong foods are more readily available.

❷ The smells and aromas are familiar and comfortable and remind us of fond memories.

It's no secret that baked goods are abundant in offices during the holidays — from patients, sales reps, specialists, and co-workers. Everyone has a favorite holiday treat. What's yours? Do you confiscate the chewiest caramel/ chocolate/nut candies for your own operatory?

Of course, the doctors who send the fruit baskets or fruitcake might as well keep it for themselves because we don't eat it in our office. If my choice is a homemade cookie or a piece of fruit, which one do you think I'll go for? Honey, look out! I'm a woman in menopause on a mission. It's turn down the thermostat and heat up the chocolate desserts!

Now that I have increased my blood pressure and my appetite by writing about two significant things in my life, let's get to that four-letter word — DIET.

There is no diet program right for everyone. Why? We are all different. Some of us need more fat, more carbohydrates, or more protein. What you need and in what proportion is important for your health. How much activity or what kind of exercise you need is also important. When you have determined this information, you will be ready to look at essential oils and how they can support you in weight loss and maintenance. The only universal

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statement we can make about weight loss and maintenance is to eat a variety of foods, watch portion size, and exercise.

Abuse, especially sexual abuse, and poor self-esteem can affect how a person uses food. Essential oils can increase feelings of well-being and counter issues of abuse and low self-esteem. Essential oils can also help control and eliminate cellulite. Brain chemistry, Ayurvedic medicine, poor self-esteem, and cellulite are four things that when teamed with essential oils can improve weight loss and maintenance.

Brain chemistry and how essential oils affect amount, desire for food

There is chemistry involved in smelling and wanting food. First, it is a learned response. See the food, smell the food = want the food, eat the food. There is also this formula: See the food, smell the food = don't want the food, don't eat the food.

What happens in the second formula? Many people think that being hungry has to do with blood sugar levels or a full stomach. Dr. Alan Hirsch is founder and neurological director of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago. He specializes in the evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of many smell- and taste-related disorders.

Dr. Hirsch says we feel full "because of a special mechanism in our brain.

Specifically, the satiety response is regulated in what is technically known as the ventromedial nucleus of the hypothalamus, a portion of the brain that regulates many basic drives. We call this portion of the hypothalamus the satiety center. One reason we stop eating is that this center signals a fullness or a sense of being satisfied." Scientists have damaged this part of the brain in rats and the rats have eaten themselves to death.

How can we affect the hypothalamus to signal full? The nose is directly connected to the hypothalamus. So now we have another formula: I smell it = I eat it.

Dr. Hirsch points out that when the nose is stuffy, it actually smells more deeply. The more deeply you smell, the more the hypothalamus is affected. Your nose has two nostrils, and only one is open at a time. Smelling through the nostril that is not as open can cause greater stimulation to the hypothalamus. Take your finger and close one side of your nose. Now smell. Close the other side and smell. Notice the difference in scent and ease of smell. One side is harder to smell through and the scent is stronger.

Dr. Hirsch explains: "An odor molecule in the air makes its way to the top of the nose to a pin-sized area of the olfactory membrane where millions of olfactory receptors are found. The odor molecule moves through a thin area of mucous and binds to receptor

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sites on the olfactory nerve. These receptor sites may be very specific, in that they are designed to detect particular odor molecules. We also know that some odor molecules respond better at some receptor sites than at others, which is part of the mechanism that allows us to discriminate between odors and identify odors that are present in our environment. Each of these receptors — and we have millions — will link with odor molecules that match them.

“Once an odor molecule reaches a receptor site, the body’s electrical signaling system begins operation. The odor molecule

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stimulates a long, thin neuron nerve cell known as the bipolar receptor cell to fire. Now a representation of the odor molecule is transmitted up to the olfactory bulb at the top of the nose. The important point here is that the representation — or neural image or picture — of the odor changes. Through a complex mechanism, the original odor stimulus is intensified by a factor of 1,000. The intensified odor signal is projected through the olfactory bulb and reaches the main components of the brain. In other words, the system operates to take individual odor molecules and then intensifies them in such a way that the brain can respond to them.”

The part of the brain where this is taking place is called the limbic lobe, which is the seat of our emotions. The limbic lobe activates the hypothalamus, which controls our drives and instincts and ability to feel full. Smelling food can trigger instinctive or mindless behavior, so we put food in our mouth. An emotional state can also trigger a desire for food.

Sometimes we can control what we feel by smelling certain scents. A vanilla scent in a house on the market seems to increase its chances for a sale. It is thought that vanilla gives people a sense of security and hominess. Scents can affect one’s appetite, as well. You can see and smell donuts in your office and want to eat one. If you smell a vanilla essential oil, you can feel secure and homey. This could replace the need to eat a donut.

Without having to intellectually respond to scent, we can react very quickly or unconsciously. The sense of smell can help us control our appetite and any irrational responses we have to food. Perhaps used consciously it can give us control where our willpower fails, such as in controlling cravings.

The Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Institute of Chicago found that inhaling a culinary scent such as basil,

oregano, or lemon regularly throughout the day, especially when hungry, could suppress the desire to taste and therefore eat. By inhaling an aroma three to six times in each nostril, the desire to eat is inhibited. If the scent is not adequately smelled, it can increase the desire to eat, so it is important to smell the oil deeply and as many times as suggested.

It was also found that oils should be changed each day to have the best effect. We are naturally attracted to different smells and tastes each day, and eating the same foods over and over again leads to feelings of deprivation, which is the most common cause of failure for most diets. Cheating on a diet could be just another way to increase variety. Dr. Hirsch also found that people cannot smell too much. In fact, the more people used scent to control their appetite, the more weight they lost in his study. So hygienists, follow your nose!

Which scents to use

Most people prefer sweet smells. Chocolate fragrance creates serotonin in the brain, which is linked to cravings for sweets. Smelling chocolate can reduce the desire for sweets. Banana, green apples, and peppermint were also found to be successful, while the flower and medicinal smelling oils were least effective. The oils associated with cooking or culinary herbs were best. When the chocolate goodies come into the office, don’t eat them, just smell them.

Fragrances are not essential oils and some people are allergic to them. I know this is my mantra, but safely using these oils with allergies is very important. Essential oils are natural products steam-distilled from plants.

Caution

People with asthma or migraine headaches may find that sniffing many smells can aggravate their conditions, so they should be very careful.

Toxicity of the liver has been reported when people use too much oil. Essential oils are not water-soluble. The liver must break down the oil into a more soluble form with the use of enzymes. If the oil is introduced into the body faster than the liver can convert it, toxicity can result. This has been primarily noted in skin application, but is worth noting here.

Aromatherapy tip

Scent of the season: cinnamon — Cinnamon has a sweet, spicy-hot fragrance that is so potent, only small amounts are needed to perk up an aromatherapy blend. The scent is well known for its use in cinnamon rolls, candles, and many comfort foods.

Uses: The essential oil of cinnamon is best described as a mover and a shaker. It is a physical and emotional stimulant that gets the blood and mind moving. It also affects the libido and is known as an aphrodisiac, as well as an antidepressant. Now, this could be really good or really bad! Researchers found that just having the aroma in a room reduces drowsiness, irritability, and the pain and frequency of headaches. It also

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increases the action of enzymes that break down food in the body, aiding the metabolic process. The essential oil fights viral, fungal, and bacterial illnesses and boosts the immune system.

Last caution: Both the leaf and bark essential oils can irritate, redden, and even burn sensitive skin, so use them carefully — no more than half a drop in a bath. Avoid their use altogether in cosmetics.

Have a “smelly” holiday and “aromatic” New Year! **RDH**

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