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Effects on food cravings of a very low calorie diet or a balanced, low calorie diet

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Abstract

It is commonly believed that dieting and the restriction of specific types of foods produces cravings for these foods. This study, therefore, compared changes in self-reported cravings experienced by 93 obese subjects with Type II diabetes who were randomly assigned to behavioral treatment programmes which used either: (a) a balanced, low-calorie diet (LCD) of 1000–1200 kcal/day throughout, with all foods allowed in moderation, or (b) a programme which included a 12-week period of a very low calorie diet (VLCD), where intake was restricted to 400 kcal/day with only lean meat, fish, or fowl allowed. There were significant decreases in cravings for all types of foods over the 20 weeks of the study for both the VLCD and the LCD conditions. The decreases in cravings were particularly pronounced for the VLCD condition for low-fat, high-protein foods (the only foods allowed on the VLCD) and for complex carbohydrates, especially grains (one of the types of foods prohibited on this diet). There was no evidence to support the belief that restricting intake of certain foods leads to increased craving for these foods or that the magnitude of weight loss is related to food cravings.

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