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Impact of Definition on Prevalence of Food Cravings in a Random Sample of Young Women

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to determine the characteristics of food cravings in a random sample of young women and to evaluate the impact of the definition used in food craving research. The Diagnostic interview for Genetic Studies and a questionnaire about food craving experiences were completed by 101 women aged between 18 and 45 years. Of this sample, 58% of respondents reported having ever experienced food cravings. Of these, 7% had experienced food cravings only during pregnancy. Fewer women met criteria for craving as the definition narrowed; 28% reported moderate to strong cravings with two features of intensity; 6% reported moderate to strong cravings with three features of intensity and 4% reported strong cravings with three features of intensity. Features of intensity or “core features” were those that related to strength of craving and were difficulty resisting eating, feeling anxious when the craved food was unavailable and a change in speed of consumption. Of strong cravers, 86% experienced at least two core features, compared with 48% of moderate and 10% of mild cravers. These features may aid in defining the craving state and should be taken into consideration in studies on food cravings.

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