

# Using Willpower to Make Food Choices

Many people believe that eating habits are easily controlled using willpower. However, our ability to use willpower to resist tempting food is limited.

## Willpower Has Limits

When tempting food is available, we can use a certain part of our brain to stop ourselves from eating.

The part of our brain that drives willpower is also responsible for planning, learning, making decisions and dealing with stress.

Using our brain to do these things uses up mental energy, making it more difficult to do another task that requires mental energy. This explains why people may find it difficult to resist eating tempting food when tired or stressed.



The brain uses blood glucose (the sugar in our blood) as fuel. When we are hungry there is less fuel available for the brain and it starts desperately looking for a quick source of energy.

We tend to make less healthy food choices when we are hungry because we are more vulnerable to the food and beverage options in our environment.

The expression “never go grocery shopping on an empty stomach” is a reminder that we tend to make more impulsive and indulgent food decisions when we are hungry.

## Exposure Leads to Food Cravings

Food and beverages that have added sugar and fat stimulate the brain’s reward system. These options are more likely to be chosen when they are available.

If we want to improve diet quality in our community, we need to reduce exposure to hard-to-resist food and beverages where people live, work, learn and play.

