

Look away, food porn may kill you



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A website recently tracked close to 186 million food-related hashtags on Twitter and Instagram over three months and found that, not surprisingly, around 66% users have a taste for unhealthy foods. Most of us have contributed to food porn at some point or the other, but did you know that uploading a picture of the scrumptious dish you tried at the new eatery in town is actually doing harm?

VISUAL HUNGER

It turns out that our eating habits are governed by the food we look at. So, if you have been scrolling through pictures of decadent desserts or triple-patty burgers, there's little chance that you will want to grab a bowl of oats instead of those mouthwatering snacks. This is because it's rare that one just looks at the pictures and does not want to eat what's in it. This is what researchers call 'visual hunger', which means the urge to eat something simply because you saw a picture of it. And it's backed by science; in one study, just looking at indulgent foods resulted in an increased feeling of hunger in healthy men and women.

Psychotherapist Meera Ravi agrees that this is a

possibility, as the brain and visual systems develop intimately. So, there is a good chance that you are grabbing that post-lunch doughnut simply because an image has tempted you to do so. "There is longing, if you see a picture of a dessert, you may want to eat it to fulfil and satisfy yourself in some way. There are psychological and neurophysiological changes

that take place. A person may want to consume certain food, and growing exposure to delectable images may have detrimental consequences. This is also a result of low willpower and could also be that the person is filling some vacuum," she says.

Nutritionist Sheela Krishnaswamy adds that craving food just by looking at it can lead to an excess intake of calories, fat, sugar and sodium, and, anything in excess can lead to health problems. "It can increase the risk of some diseases. Visual hunger can be attributed to a person being stressed, or simply hungry. If that is the case, then he/she should ideally reach out to healthy foods," she says.



Visual hunger is the urge to eat something simply because you saw a picture of it

TURN YOUR GAZE AWAY

Meera warns that the obesity crisis is growing, and eating with our eyes will only make matters worse. But how does one keep from getting tempted? "Change the visual. If an ice-cream sundae appears on your screen, just go to another site. If you are stressed and are, therefore, craving some foods, there are other ways to beat it. Divert your mind away from the picture, take a walk, drink water or talk to someone. If you are hungry, keep a pack of chikkis, dry fruits, fresh fruits or cereal bars in your bag and munch on them immediately — this can help reduce hunger and, perhaps, craving as well," adds Sheela.

