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## WHY CRUNCHY FOODS CAN HELP YOU LOSE WEIGHT

*Sam Bailey*

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Are you partial to a carrot? Well, it turns out there might be a reason why it leaves you satisfied. And it doesn't include night vision.

Beyond the street cred you get from being a health buff, chomping on a carrot also leads to a particular eating habit - an audible 'crunch effect' (aka that serious jaw workout) which is one of the secrets to keeping your weight down.

A combined Brigham Young University and Colorado State University [study](#) the noise your food makes while eating has a significant effect on how much you'll eat.

And it makes a lot of sense - if you're hankering down on a carrot (or alternatively a packet of Red Rock Deli chips on 'cheat day') in public, you're not going to want to have seconds, or too many handfuls - the crunching noise required will draw far too much attention and may make you feel self conscious around others.

But, gutsiness aside, research indicates if we can't hear ourselves and the noise gets muffled, during say, a Netflix and chill session, it becomes the biggest barrier to us consciously crunching (and to maintaining healthy eating habits).

In the experiment, researchers had people wear headphones and listen to either soft or loud noise while they nibbled. Results

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found that the group that were exposed to a noisier background managed to eat nearly double the amount of pretzels compared to those in a quiet environment.

Dr Nicholas Fuller the University of Sydney's Boden Institute of Obesity believes there is a degree of merit to the study - but it shouldn't be taken as complete verbatim.

"Sensory awareness (the sound of eating or drinking) can play an important role in encouraging healthy eating behaviours and help to decrease the amount of food we eat."

"However, what cannot be determined from this study is whether or not this it would have an effect on a person's energy intake over a period of time, and consequently their body weight, as the study only analysed total food intake at one meal," says Fuller.

So before you go crazy stocking up on a 'crunchy food' only menu, Fuller says to look beyond the literal and more at the bigger factor at play - mindfulness.

"Previous research has shown there appears to be a positive relationship between mindfulness and eating behaviours - individuals who are more mindful in everyday life and report better psychological health and well-being are associated with having more positive eating behaviours, healthier eating practices, better sleep and overall physical health."

Not all food sounds are equal though. That sizzling, crackling bacon, won't cut it (sorry!) It's the act of chewing and crunching that will have you consciously connecting to those mouthfuls, not cooking sounds alone.

"Digestion begins in the mouth", says nutritionist Louise Cavanough of [Health Space Bondi Junction](#). "So when we chew it sends signals to our stomach that food is on the way and it's time to get digestive enzymes at the ready. By eating slowly, we give the body time to recognise its satiety, which prevents eating to excess."

"In the case of crunchy foods, they require more chewing than others, so hearing ourselves chew is theoretically another chance to eat slowly and a cue to be present and take pleasure from what we are doing - which is, enjoying delicious food," says Cavanough.

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Cavanough says by being more mindful, this ultimately helps us maintain a healthy weight, as we stop eating when we are satisfied, not full.

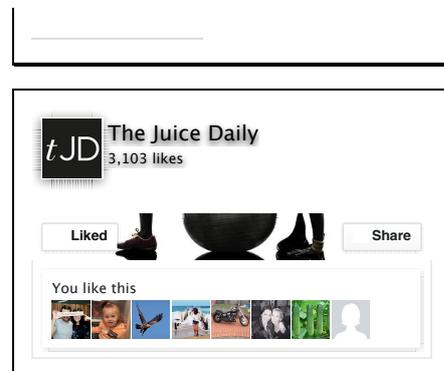
So at the crux of it all, it's about mindfulness. If we listen to our body's cues, it will make an incredible difference.

"It takes 20 minutes for the brain to register that we are full - so if we eat mindlessly it can result in eating much more than originally intended," says Nikki Jankelowitz of [Centred Meditation](#).

"Digestion is intrinsically connected to the parasympathetic nervous system (the opposite of the fight or flight response) and triggers an intricate series of hormonal signals between the gut and the nervous system, including the production of digestive enzymes that help you break down your food," says Jankelowitz.

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"If we eat when stressed, in a hurry, upset or distracted, our fight



or flight mode is heightened and this subsequently inhibits the important activities needed in our digestive system which then has a myriad of consequences, including our weight and ability to control it.”

So, what are the best to munchies to get us mindful? Cavanaugh recommends adding crunchy toppings to smoothies – such as nuts, seeds or cacao nibs (so you still have chew each mouthful instead of gulping it down) and also eating snacks such as buckinis, celery and carrots (naturally) and dehydrated vegetable chips (such as kale, sweet potato, beetroot, parsnip etc).

But, aside from a little jaw action and good snack choices, the ‘crunch line’ of it all? Nosh on foods with substance and texture and consciously connect to the sounds while you chew.

*The University of Sydney’s Boden Institute is currently undertaking a weight loss trial, for those interested in participating, please see [www.metabolictrial.com](http://www.metabolictrial.com) for more details.*



### About the person who wrote this

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Sam Bailey is a Sydney-based journalist whose passion for health and fitness and has seen her write across health titles including Womens Fitness, Womens Health, Body + Soul and Daily Mail Australia. In her down time you can find her sipping green smoothies, attempting complex yoga poses and soaking up vitamin D on Bondi beach.

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