

# Mindfulness may reduce cravings for food and drugs, says review

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Mindfulness strategies may help prevent or interrupt cravings for food and drugs, such as cigarettes and alcohol, by occupying short term memory, according to a new review from City, University of London.

Looking at experimental studies that have examined the effects of different types of mindfulness strategies on [cravings](#), it was found that in many instances these strategies brought about an immediate reduction in craving. The research was published in *Clinical Psychology Review*.

Craving can be defined as an intense, conscious desire, usually to consume a specific drug or food. There is also a significant body of research that suggests it is causally linked to behaviour. For example, craving predicts relapse episodes in substance use and [food cravings](#)

predict both eating and weight gain. As such, cravings are often considered an appropriate target for intervention.

Mindfulness meditation has a long tradition of being used to address cravings. According to ancient Buddhist texts, craving leads to suffering but can be avoided through [mindfulness meditation](#) practice. More recently, mindfulness-based interventions have been used to explicitly target cravings with the aim of bringing about clinically relevant changes to behaviour.

Mindfulness interventions typically employ a range of different types of [strategy](#), for example they may include exercises designed to promote greater awareness of bodily sensations, to develop an attitude of acceptance toward uncomfortable feelings, or to help individuals see themselves as separate from their thoughts and emotions.

However, there is currently a limited understanding of the ways in which these different types of strategy may influence craving-related outcomes, either independently, or in combination. As a result, the review aimed to address these limitations by reviewing studies that have examined the independent effects of mindfulness on craving.

Looking at 30 studies which met the criteria, it was found that some of the beneficial effects seen for mindfulness strategies in relation to craving are likely to stem from interrupting cravings by loading working memory, a part of our [short-term memory](#) which is concerned with immediate conscious perceptual and linguistic processing.

In addition, it was also seen that mindfulness reduced craving over the medium term, most likely due to 'extinction processes'; essentially strategies that result in the individual inhibiting craving-related responses and behaviours which eventually lead to reduced cravings.

Dr. Katy Tapper, author of the review and a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at City, University of London, said:

"The research suggests that certain mindfulness-based strategies may help prevent or interrupt cravings by occupying a part of our mind that contributes to the development of cravings. Whether mindfulness strategies are more effective than alternative strategies, such as engaging in visual imagery, has yet to be established. However, there is also some evidence to suggest that engaging in regular mindfulness practice may reduce the extent to which people feel the need to react to their cravings, though further research is needed to confirm such an effect."

Provided by City University London

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