

## Cravings during Pregnancy

Written by Sister Elizabeth Beavon  
Sunday, 06 January 2013 21:13

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During pregnancy many interesting changes happen to one's body. One of the most common things to happen is the development of intense **cravings** or aversions to the taste, smell or texture of certain foods. Why this happens is still a matter of debate.

Food cravings or aversions are a worldwide phenomenon that women have experienced throughout history. Some researchers feel it is a behavioural or psychological phenomenon, others feel it is a dietary deficiency and others feel they are due to *hormonal changes*. It continues to be a matter of speculation.

Cultural beliefs are very influential on cravings and aversions. Some cultures believe that if a craving is not satisfied then the baby will be born with a mark that resembles the craving. Other cultures avoid certain foods; in Japan a pregnant woman will not eat shrimps as her baby may be born with a curved back.

Hormonal changes during pregnancy are believed to affect the *sense of smell, the sense of taste as well as the texture of the food*, making some foods more appealing than others. Often this is a good thing as pregnant women are commonly nauseated by the smell of cigarette smoke or they can't tolerate coffee and alcohol anymore. This ties in with the belief that aversions are a protective mechanism, protecting the developing foetus from potentially harmful substances. However, one of the most commonly reported aversions is to the smell of meat. The answer to why this happens is not known as meat is generally considered to be a healthy protein, benefiting the developing baby.

During the first trimester there can be an increased sensitivity to bitter tastes. This sensitivity lessens by the third trimester as threat to foetal development passes. The craving for sour foods seems to be most common in the third trimester.

Dietary needs or deficiencies are the most commonly believed cause of *cravings*. When a woman is pregnant her calorie needs increase, however she may be nauseous due to hormonal changes, therefore salty, sweet, spicy and sour foods are more appealing resulting in a better calorie intake and a healthier pregnancy.

Healthy food cravings are commonly fruit, which is a good combination of sweet and sour tastes, as well as milk and milk products. Other common cravings are for chocolate and

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salty/sour snacks like pickles.

A peculiar craving that can occur during pregnancy is known as Pica. This is a craving for things that aren't food. The word Pica comes from the Latin for Magpie, a bird that is known for being quite indiscriminate when it comes to food. Pica cravings are believed to be due to a mineral deficiency as the most common craving is for clay, dirt and ice. Eating ice has been associated with iron deficiencies. Iron deficient people have tongue irritations which are soothed by ice. Once the deficiency has been rectified, the craving disappears.

Most cravings are harmless. It is important however not to overindulge in these cravings as they could adversely affect your health. Too much of anything will cause you to gain too much weight, too much salt can raise your blood pressure, too much sugar could cause gestational diabetes. When indulging in a craving keep the quantity small and the quality good.

Many researchers believe that a pregnant woman's **cravings** are psychological, and influenced or triggered by hearing about the cravings of others. Could this mean that many pregnant women in Great Britain will be craving Lavender Shortbread just like Princess Kate?

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