

**What this fact sheet covers:**

- Findings of a Black Dog Institute study that links chocolate craving and personality style in people with depression.

Introduction

People who crave chocolate when they're depressed are more likely to have certain personality styles than others. A Black Dog Institute web-based study has found that depressed people who rate high on personality styles of 'irritability' and 'rejection sensitivity' crave chocolate and use it to sooth anxiety, stress and depression.

Key points to remember:

The research, published in the October 2007 issue of the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, investigated the self-reported benefits of eating chocolate during a depressive episode, and whether there was a link between personality type and craving chocolate to alleviate symptoms.

Nearly 3000 people who reported having clinical depression completed a survey via the Black Dog Institute website. Their average age was 40 and more than 70 per cent were women. More than 54 per cent reported food cravings when depressed and 45 percent specifically craved chocolate (nearly 51 percent of the women and almost 31 per cent of the men).

Those who said chocolate improved their depressed mood were also more likely to find it significantly reduced their anxiety and irritability as well.

Temperament and personality questionnaire scores showed the chocolate cravers had significantly higher average scores on irritability, rejection sensitivity, anxious worrying, self-criticism and self-focus – the five personality dimensions associated with 'emotional dysregulation'. By contrast, a correlation was not found in personality dimensions of perfectionism or in scales that measure introversion and extraversion.

Further analysis showed that irritability and rejection sensitivity were the only two significant predictors of chocolate craving. However, chocolate cravers had higher scores for appetite increase, weight gain, rejection sensitivity, over sleeping, and limbs feeling heavy like lead – all symptoms associated with so-called 'atypical depression'.

Professor Gordon Parker, Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute and co-author of the study, said the most intriguing finding was the specific link between chocolate craving and personality style.

"The results suggest that people with certain personality styles crave chocolate, not only when they're depressed, but also when they are anxious and irritable and that eating chocolate improves their mood," Professor Parker said.



Personality style and chocolate craving

Fact Sheet

“Chocolate does not have benefits in those who are extraverts, introverts or perfectionists.”

“About 15 per cent of the population have the personality styles associated with ‘emotional dysregulation’. That is, their limbic cortex, the brain circuitry that regulates our response to a threat, whether consciously or unconsciously perceived, is more active - always on the alert.”

Professor Parker explained that for these people chocolate appears to have a calming effect on that heightened state of readiness, and the emotional responses that go with it.

“It seems chocolate cravings may reflect biological mechanisms for soothing personality-based emotional states that lead to anxiety, irritability and depression,” he said.

Where to get more information

- British Journal of Psychiatry (2007), 191, 06-33746/1-2

Black Dog Institute

Hospital Road, Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick NSW 2031

(02) 9382 4530 / (02) 9382 4523

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Email: blackdog@blackdog.org.au