

HEALTH EFFECTS AND PIZZA ADDICTION

Summary:

Pizza is not only the most popular but is one of the most addictive foods to eat. Its irresistible ingredients trigger food addiction that may affect regions of our brain the same way drugs do.

The Study:

Have you ever met someone who doesn't like pizza? **The chewy dough made with white flour, the fatty cheese, and the sugary sauce make an irresistible meal which can lead to food addiction and obesity.** Food addiction is an overlooked widespread illness that contributes to the obesity epidemic in the U.S. Obesity is a serious chronic disease that is associated with **a decrease in productivity, 149 billion dollars in medical expenses per year** and is the leading cause of many illnesses like **cancer, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease**². Studies have shown that foods like pizza that have the **combination of artificially large amounts of salt, sugar, and fat are prone to triggering over-eating and food addiction** due to the reaction with the reward system in the brain¹.



The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) surveyed more than 100 students that attend the University of Michigan and 400 other adults about which 35 foods they associated with addictive-like eating behaviors¹. When the results were tallied, **pizza was found to be one of the most addictive foods on the list.** When you eat something high in sugar and fat, your blood sugar spikes rapidly and then rebound back to below where it started prior to eating the pizza, making you feel hungry. The spike and rebound of blood sugar is important because there is a known **link between sugar levels and activation in areas of the brain that are related to addiction**¹.

A study found that foods high in sugar and fats influenced the brain just like heroin or opium did³. Just like drug addicts, obese people have a decreased amount of dopamine receptors, meaning they are more likely to crave foods that

increase their dopamine like carbs, sugars, and fats. Our bodies are naturally wired to crave foods that are high in calories and provide us with a lot of energy, however, **eating these in excess can send our brains on edge leading to addiction.** There have been signs of opiate-like withdrawals when sugar is removed from the diet³. This explains why low-carbohydrate diets result in headaches, increased drowsiness, and irritability.

Conclusion:

Pizza is a type of processed food with high quantities of sugars and fats that are correlated to addictive behaviors. Food addiction is a problematic phenomenon that is correlated to obesity which decreases productivity, costs billions in medical expenses, and causes illnesses like cancer, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Policy Recommendations:

Although the addictive nature of pizza was the primary focus of the study, there are many other types of food that are also high in salt, sugar, and fat with addictive effects. I would like support for additional funding of broader research on the topic of addictive foods and their correlation to obesity, productivity, and related illnesses.

References:

¹Erica M. Schulte, Nicole M. Avena, and Ashley N. Gearhardt. 2015. "Which Foods May Be Addictive? The Roles of Processing, Fat Content, and Glycemic Load," U.S. National Library of Medicine.

²Parvez H, Bisher K, Meguid N. 2007. "Obesity and Diabetes in the Developing World- A Growing Challenge." *The New England Journal of Medicine*. **356**: 213-215

³Pelchat M. 2002. "Of human bondage: food craving, obsession, compulsion, and addiction." *Physiol Behav* **76**: 347–352.