It's All In Your Head...Really!

By Dani-Jean Stuart, Hudson

I'd wager a chocolate bar that I'm not the only So, let's move on for a look at the stress element in this Dispatcher who has cravings for fatty, sugary, or salty equation. Scientists know enough about brain chemistry foods. Not necessarily in that order, but definitely vary- to know that serotonin release in the brain is controlled ing in combination of those elements and certainly with by food intake. Eating carbs increases serotonin, protein varying levels of intensity. You know what I'm talking intake doesn't. Serotonin is linked to sleep onset, pain about! All the way from "Hmm, I'd really like some sensitivity...and mood control. "Hence many patients chocolate" to "Look, if y'all get between me and that last learn to overeat carbohydrates (particularly snack foods, donut? Someone's gonna get hurt."

paired with stress drives carb cravings. Just look at folks stressful conditions? (You can read the source material circling the donut box at a NHEDA meeting. No one I wants to be the first to dive in, but that box gets our at-pubmed/8697046). tention every time. I've decided to solve the "not wanting to be first" issue by bringing donuts and just openly I'm guessing that most of the time if you're reaching for pillaging the supply in plain view of all attendees.

But seriously. stress is often considered just "how we roll" in dispatch. searchers said patients "learn" to overeat carbs. Well, Schedule rotation, vacation/sick fill-in, adrenal response, here's a thumbnail version of how we learn. We learn caffeine use...each of these contributes to the two con- by grouping information and/or actions together, a procditions feeding on each other. Trying to figure out which ess called, "chunking." It's one of the reasons we can comes first..sleep disruption or stress..is much like hav- easily learn a 7 digit phone number, we "chunk" the ining the chicken/egg debate. The bottom line is that two formation together. things we consider normal in our work environment seriously affect our food choices.

part of your brain that's considered the area that regu-input of the higher regions of our brains. lates control..the Executive Function..decreases in activity. And the primitive area of your brain..related primar- So where does that leave those of us who use food as a ily to instinct..increases in activity.

Under these brain function patterns, test subjects chose higher caloric value foods to the tune of an additional Up next: Habits, satiety, and the dreaded word 600-900 calories over healthier choices. You can read "meditation" http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/ that study here: articles/PMC2919439/.

like potato chips or pastries, which are rich in carbohydrates and fats) to make themselves feel better." Is it I'm guessing it's not news to you that sleep disruption any wonder that human beings hit the carbs under http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/ quoted here:

> chocolate, or chips, or [insert your favorite salty, sugary, fatty food herel, like me you're not giving it much Working on little sleep and with daily thought, you're doing it out of habit. Notice that re-

Once you've learned a behavior/habit that way, fMRI studies show a lot of activity in the brain at the begin-We know this anecdotally but current brain science ap- ning of the behavior, and at the end of the behavior, but pears to confirm it. UC Berkeley researchers have used not a lot of brain activity in between (from a June 2014 functional MRI technology to study what happens in the article in Scientific American). So when someone brain when someone is short on sleep. The waking fMRI reaches for junk food out of habit in response to sleep images show a decrease in activity in the frontal lobes of deprivation and/or stress, they are literally giving almost the brain and an increase in activity in the lower lobes of no thought to what they're doing! It's like a different the brain. Basically, when you're sleep deprived, the way of self-medicating and we're doing it without the

> feel good habit? Does just the thought stress you out? Wait! NO! Don't reach for that cookie!

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