

The Possible Science Behind Comfort Food

Do the words comfort food mean anything to you? There's a very good chance they do, regardless of how you were brought up. The fact is, sometimes life just puts so much pressure that your mind starts to seek out ways to take focus away from the stress and anxiety of modern life. There are numerous ways to achieve this effect, though it would cause a lot of stress to list all the possible methods. However, in a pinch, occupying your taste buds is pretty equivalent to occupying the mind. In other words, comfort food can often be the easiest, most convenient means of stress relief. Take a second to think about that possibility. Modern society seems hard-wired to make sure people are going to feel upset at one point or another. Stress and anxiety are facets of modern life that you can't get rid of, no matter how hard you try. Of course, with life being as fast-paced as it is, taking an hour or two out of your busy day for stress relief is unfeasible. In some cases, it might not even be a practical option! So naturally, the body adjusts and the mind finds an acceptable alternative way to relieve all that stress. For the sake of maintaining mental health, of course. More often not, the simplest alternative is to grab a candy bar and start munching. Apparently, there's more to eating comfort food than initially thought, as science is starting to discover some information on this field. It is safe to say that moods can be dictated by the chemicals that control the central nervous system. It is also medically sound to say that certain activities and foods cause the body to release some biochemical compounds that affect the mood. Exercise and chocolate, for example, both cause the body to produce larger numbers of endorphins. Endorphins, as some people have so eloquently put it, make people feel happy. However, pressed for time as most people tend to be in modern civilization, exercise isn't really an option at all times. So that leaves the easier, more readily available alternative. Mental health experts also believe that comfort food can also be linked to memories, and not merely their potential psychoactive effects. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests that some people take comfort in certain foods due to a link to a positive experience or loved one from the past. The positive memories can sometimes be enough to trigger the central nervous system to produce a variety of chemicals that have positive effects on mood and performance. A man who has a thing for eating blueberry cheesecakes may be subconsciously associating said food with a positive figure from his childhood, like a close relative who liked to make blueberry cheesecakes. In an evolutionary sense, comfort food also makes sense, it would seem. Most comfort food tends to be of the high-energy sort, typically foods that give the body a sudden energy boost. The tendency of people to eat high-energy foods during moments of stress and anxiety related to the natural survival instinct. During times of stress, performance is compromised and anything that can alleviate that problem could prove critical to survival in a natural environment. Now, just take the words natural environment and replace them with corporate workplace and you've got a perfectly apt comparison. The quick boost of energy from comfort foods—whether it happens to be dark chocolate or a greasy cheeseburger—could be what the mind needs to stay sharp. It would appear that the science behind comfort food is more complex than initially believed. Still, despite the risks of obesity, people will still turn to food as a quick source of relief. Even if it could cost them dearly when they pick the wrong weight loss pill to compensate for their eating binges. Why? Because good food is so damn hard to turn down.

About the Author

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