

Strange Tastes / Hungering and Thirsting

Denise: Have you ever had a craving – or very strong desire – to eat a certain food? Or you smelled something you wanted to eat, and you couldn't think about anything else?

Tammy: Hello – welcome to Women of Hope, I'm Tammy. That's an interesting question Denise. Welcome – it's good to have you here today.

Denise: Thank you. It's always good to be here. And of course Carol's here too.

Carol: Hello... this sounds like something interesting to talk about together today.

This happened to me when I was pregnant *I couldn't get enough oranges!*

Tammy: Me too.

Denise: It has happened to me when I was *very* hungry! Or hot and thirsty. I think we've all experienced this at one time or another.

Sometimes, though, people have a craving for things that are actually *not* even *food!*

Tammy: Really? Like what kinds of things?

Denise: It might sound a little strange to want to eat something that's not meant to be eaten, but this has been happening for a long time. And it happens all over the world! I once shared a room with a girl who craved soil, clay and chalk.

Carol: That sounds strange! ...But I've heard of this – is this what's called "pica"?

Denise: That's right. *Pica* is most common in young children, who will often grow out of it, but it happens to adults too.

Tammy: Tell us more about the kinds of things people with pica crave...and eat?

Denise: Well, we already mentioned soil, clay and chalk...and some people might even eat sand. Then there's cleaning products, paint, plaster, string, hair and cloth. We all know that these are *not* *foods* and are *not meant to be eaten*...but, these cravings can be very strong and can cause a person to do something that doesn't make sense to them.

Some things people crave *are* food, like cornstarch, baking (cooking) soda...baking powder...coffee grounds. Even though these things *are* food they're not meant to be eaten in large amounts or in their powder form. *They* are ingredients for cooking of course and are usually eaten in prepared foods. I heard about one woman who ate two cans of baking powder...and another who ate three to four large bags of crushed ice in a day.

Carol: I don't think it would be good for your teeth to eat a lot of ice .

Denise: No, it can actually wear the teeth down.

Along with these strange tastes, some people have a strong craving to *smell* odd things. Usually things like cleaning substances.

Tammy: What causes these cravings?

Denise: Studies have been done to try to figure out the cause – but they really don't know for sure.

Carol: Today we're talking about an eating disorder called *pica* – eating things that are not actually food.

Denise: Some people might think eating certain things will help relieve nausea or vomiting. This may be why it happens a little more often with pregnant women.

Tammy: I remember when I was pregnant I felt nauseated a lot...and I just wanted something in my stomach all the time.

Denise: That's pretty natural – and eating something usually does help with the nausea. But the best thing is something like dry biscuits...not clay, or baking soda!

Another possible cause for this strong craving is that the body is low in nutrients. Our bodies need these minerals but sometimes we don't get enough in our food. Minerals like calcium, iron or iodine can be found in some of the strange things we mentioned that people eat.

Craving for something that's not food is more common among those with too little iron in the blood. We've talked in the past about low iron in the blood... We said that *iron* is an important mineral that we all need to get from our food. Iron helps make up the part of our red blood cells that carries oxygen to all the cells of our body...and especially helps our muscles. If we don't have enough oxygen in our blood we will get run down and tired. Foods like beans, nuts, seeds, meats, eggs and green leafy vegetables have iron in them.

Carol: It's good to be reminded of the foods we need to eat so that we *do* have enough iron. Here they are again: beans, nuts, seeds, meat (especially red meat), eggs, and green leafy vegetables. During pregnancy, a woman needs more iron and other minerals. So is this possibly the cause of *pica* in pregnancy?

Denise: Possibly...but no-one really knows if *pica* causes the iron deficiency or if low iron causes a craving for non-food things.

When we're pregnant, we already have changes in appetite, strange cravings and changes in smell. Also, our body needs extra nutrients to grow the baby. It's possible a woman may not be getting the nutrition she needs for all the work her body has to do. This might cause the unusual craving.

Tammy: But it sounds like most of the things a person with *pica* craves *do not* have any nutrients in them. So, in this case the craving can't be coming from what our body is missing. There must be another cause.

Denise: That's very true. Sometimes *pica* may be caused by superstitions, or certain customs or traditions in the person's culture.

It's also found sometimes in people who have mental or social difficulties.

Tammy: Should we be concerned about this practice? I mean, is this dangerous?

Denise: Well, it can be...quite dangerous. It causes different problems depending on what's eaten.

In the case of eating soil, we would worry about the bacteria and parasites in the soil. These bacteria can cause us to have serious diarrhea or other sickness.

We mentioned paint and cleaning products. They contain a lot of chemicals that might be harmful! This can damage the liver, kidneys and other organs that have to filter out these substances that are poisonous to the body.

Eating clay or chalk can cause constipation. And eating sand or soil can cause quite serious pain in the gut, and possibly bleeding.

Some old, peeling paint contains lead – this can cause kidney damage and even slow down mental development.

And of course in pregnancy, the baby needs good nutrition to grow properly – so eating things that are poisonous can poison the baby.

Also, a person who eats a lot of things that *aren't* food might feel full and not get enough of the *good* foods they need. This is a special concern in children who have small appetites and can eat only a small amount at a time. It's also a worry for pregnant women who have increased nutritional needs and should not fill up on something that won't provide *any* nutrition.

Carol: So is there a treatment for pica?

Denise: There really is no treatment – the only thing we can do is educate people about it and help them understand that it can cause a lot of harm.

Carol: So what should you do if you, or a family member, find yourself craving something that's not food?

Denise: First, check with your doctor or health care worker. They may take blood tests to make sure you're not low in certain minerals – especially iron.

Talk over the problem with the doctor or with a friend or family member you trust. Once you talk about it, it may help you to think about what you're doing...and they may help you to think of a solution.

Be sure to eat a variety of foods and make sure you drink enough water.

If you suffer from nausea, ginger tea might help.

And here's an idea...try to think of a good food to replace the one you're not meant to eat. Instead of chalk, try to eat cheese or yoghurt and more green leafy vegetables.

Instead of soil, eat some nuts or seeds or beans to fill you up.

And if you can, remove the thing that you are tempted to eat so you can't see it.

When you feel a craving you might try chewing gum or do something – like go for a walk to keep you busy and take your mind off what you're craving.

Tammy: It's good to be together on Women of Hope. Denise is our guest today and she's going to talk to us about a different kind of hunger...

Denise: We've been talking today about being hungry for things that are not actually food. Let's talk about hunger a little more – a different kind of hunger this time.

But first, think of a time when you went without food or water for a long time. Remember that weak feeling and the rumbling noise in your stomach, or a dry mouth? Maybe you even feel that way right now? We all need physical nourishment to give us the energy to keep going, and our stomach lets us know when it's time to eat. Or our mouths get dry and we are reminded that we haven't had enough water to drink.

Did you know that the Bible talks about being hungry and thirsty too? The prophet Isaiah spoke God's words when he said: *If you are thirsty, come and drink water! If you don't have any money, come, eat what you want! (Isa. 55:1) CEV*

But the Bible is not talking about the physical bread and rice we eat every day. It's not talking about the kind of water we drink from a cup. Instead, this is a picture that helps us understand a very important truth about ourselves. The Bible is talking about the nourishment God gives us deep inside, in our soul. You see, sometimes our bellies are full, but in our soul we still have an ache.

Our *soul* is that part of us deep inside that only we know about – it's the real "me" that makes me who I am, different from everyone else. People look at me on the outside and decide who I am. But, only I know who I am inside. And, only you know who *you* really are inside. That can seem a little lonely. But, there's someone else who knows who you *really* are – God does! He is the one who made you, so he knows you much, much better than you know yourself. Does that scare you? It doesn't have to. It should be comforting. It's comforting because even though God knows you inside and out and *everything* about you, he still loves you just the way you are! He loves me, too, and I'm so thankful!

Tammy: Welcome back to Women of Hope...

Denise: You might be wondering how God can help you with the ache you have? How can he satisfy that hunger or the longing in your soul? That ache is there because God made you, he loves you and you were meant to have a relationship with him. Without a relationship with God, that empty feeling won't go away.

Those wrong things we've done, those wrong thoughts we have... our sins ...they make us feel like we don't deserve God's love. So we try to pretend he isn't there. We feel ashamed.

The truth is that none of us deserves God's love. But, because he loves us so much, he took care of the problem for us. Jesus Christ, God's only son, died to take the punishment for our sins...in our place. He did this so that we can have that relationship with God that we long for. What we need to do is to tell him we're sorry for our sins and that we want that close relationship with him.

One day, some people were looking for Jesus after he fed a crowd of 5000 near the lake. Carol will read what it says in God's word, the Bible:

Carol: 'When they found him he said to them: "You're not looking for me because you saw the miracles, but because you ate all the food you wanted. Don't work for food that spoils, work for food that gives eternal life..."

The people asked, "What exactly does God want us to do?" Jesus answered, "God wants you to have faith in the one he sent."

...Then Jesus told them, "My father is the one who gives you the true bread from heaven. And the bread that God gives is the one who came down from heaven to give life to the world."

The people said, "Sir, give us this bread and don't ever stop."

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life! No-one who comes to me will ever be hungry. No-one who has faith in me will ever be thirsty."

Denise: Jesus satisfies the hunger and thirst in our souls. We don't have to look to other things to fill us up and make us happy. Friend, don't try to fill the emptiness in your soul with things that won't satisfy you. It might be that you try to fill the ache with a relationship. You might try to get the approval

of your husband, your parent or a friend. It might be that you're trying really hard to do your work very well so people will be proud of you. But nobody notices.

I was very shy and was the lastborn in the family. Many times, I felt like no one even noticed me. It wasn't until someone explained these things to me and I came to know Jesus that those deep disappointments and hurts were healed.

I want to tell you that there are no good substitutes for the real thing. You might feel better for a while but that empty feeling will come back. We talked earlier about some strange cravings – eating unusual things that we shouldn't. We said that even though we want something, it could be the wrong thing for us. And, it could even be dangerous to eat!!! In the same way, we can fill our lives with the wrong things, and push God aside. We sometimes make a mess of our lives. Other times, our life may be full, but we won't be satisfied.

God offers real nourishment, lasting joy and forgiveness from sin - and it is all free! You just have to believe it's true. Remember the part of the Bible we read earlier said, *If you don't have any money, come, eat what you want!?*

Friend, don't let your sins eat you up on the inside. We have all done wrong. But Jesus took care of it for us. What we really need is forgiveness and a new heart – we need to be made clean from the inside out.

Denise: My friend, please hear God's words to you today. Are you ready to come to him to let him fill you with what you *really* need? God's word says, *Why waste your money on what really isn't food? Why work hard for something that doesn't satisfy? Listen carefully to me...[God says]...and you will enjoy the very best foods. (Isa. 55:2 CEV)*

Carol: Thank you Denise. Friend, let's pray and ask God to help us...

Thank you God for creating me to have a relationship with you. Please forgive me for the wrong things I've done and the wrong thoughts I've had. I want to enjoy the food that you give – that will satisfy my soul. Thank you for sending Jesus to be the Bread of Life. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Tammy: Before we go, I would like to read a letter from a listener today. It talks about some of the women who meet together and pray for other women around the world...including you. I hope it will encourage you. This is what she said:

"We meet with young students in our home. We have fellowship, bake and eat together. We are all together 10 women. We make an appointment once a month and pray for all the items on the Project Hannah prayer calendar for this month. Then we have another group who prays at church. We meet with their leaders in my house. My hope is this will continue to work so well in the future."

And another listener wrote:

"Ever since we collected the prayer items for (our country), it was heavily on my heart to pray for a lady whose husband is not a Christian yet... but for unknown reasons she suddenly turned up in the capital in a church service. She went to the front, renewed her commitment to Christ and in tears asked the church to pray for her. After the service she told me that she feels the Lord is working in her heart in a special way this month... I told her that women all around the world were praying for her country, and for her. It was a great encouragement for her."

Carol: It was good to hear from these friends of Women of Hope We would love to hear from you too. We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.