

**Text B**

## Can we become addicted to food?

There are times when I feel I'm a bit addicted to certain foodstuffs. Usually it's chocolate or crusty buttery toast, especially when I'm feeling a bit down, but in the summer, for example, it's juicy nectarines. But is this real addiction or just cravings?

In an effort to find out, scientists carried out experiments with rats which seemed to suggest that food addiction was a reality. They fed the rats with either their usual healthy rations or a mixture of fats and sugar. However, given the option, rats weren't interested in their normal rations and, when the fatty sugary alternative was withdrawn, rats showed all the signs of withdrawal symptoms including shaking, sweating and changes in levels of brain chemicals. They were even willing to run across an electrically charged strip and get an electric shock just to get a hit of their favourite foodstuff. There have been studies on food addiction in humans. The Yale Food Addiction scale questionnaire is often used to evaluate this and it has been found that foodstuffs such as crisps, chocolate, sweets, chips, biscuits, white bread and pasta are favourites. However the most addictive was ice cream!

The standard guide for American psychiatrists says that, to qualify as an addiction, addicts need to show signs of tolerance of the item, withdrawal when it is removed and exhibit behaviour such as giving up or reducing important activities and spending a great deal of time obtaining the substance. Whether these criteria can be applied to my desire to scoff nectarines in the summer is debatable and some health experts are dubious about claims that we can become food addicts. They point out that studies on rats are not the same as studies on humans and that results from experiments on one shouldn't be extrapolated to the other. They also criticise the fact that scientists are unable to pinpoint what exactly it is in food that could cause addiction: sugar, salt, fat or a mixture of all three?

Opinions are still divided but imagine it was confirmed that sugar or salt or fat were addictive. Would this mean that parents who fed their children sugary, salty or fatty foods were stimulating addictive behaviour? To be honest, I think many of us today are obsessed with food in some way – whether it's eating it, reading about it, watching TV programmes about it or cooking it. What's happened to society? Does the fact that we live such stressful lives and increasingly lead more isolated, solitary lives mean we're turning to food for comfort? And if so, where will it all end?