Craving Killer No. 1
ACCEPT DEFEAT
Playing head games isn't the only way Forman and his colleagues torture dieters in the name of science. They gave 98 study participants a questionnaire to determine how susceptible they were to food urges, then loaded them up with transparent boxes of Hershey's Kisses they had to keep with them at all times for the next 48 hours. Those who proved most successful at fighting temptation used an acceptance-based strategy they had been taught: Acknowledge the craving, accept it, and choose not...
Recent research from Tufts University revealed that surrendering to a craving is sometimes the best course of action—as long as you can practice portion control. In a study of 32 overweight women, all averaged an 8 percent weight loss after 12 months, but those who were most successful gave in to their cravings occasionally. When they did indulge, they ate small amounts—just enough to be satisfied, says Roberts, one of the study’s co-authors. The key is practicing restraint, not deprivation. “When you forbid a food, it only becomes more attractive, and you become likely to overeat,” says Janet Polivy, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. So when you need to feed the cocoa monster, reach for a prepackaged snack, such as Entenmann’s Little Bites 100 Calorie Pack Brownie Squares, and call it a day. You’ll be much less likely to break down and attack an entire hot fudge sundae.

Craving Killer No. 2
GIVE IN—A LITTLE
Now this is our kind of news.

Craving Killer No. 3
FANTASIZE
Being told to think of something else when you’re in the grip of a powerful craving is about as helpful as being told to swim when you’re drowning. But there is one way that advice can work: Researchers at Flinders University in Australia found that occupying your senses with a vivid non-food fantasy just might stifle your urge.

“Your short-term memory has limited storage,” says study author Eva Kemps. To conjure any image—magnolias or that spring break in Cancun—you need to pull them out of your long-term memory, the way an iPod cues up one song at a time from the gazillion it has in storage. But short-term memory has only so much room; it can’t play “Cheeseburger in Paradise” and “Holiday” at the same time. “The idea is to keep your short-term memory busy by fantasizing about something else,” Kemps says. It worked for Kemps’s study participants. When they were asked to drum up remembered smells and sights—the scent of freshly cut grass or a log fire, and images such as a hot-air balloon or the Sydney Opera House—their cravings for chocolate (which was right in front of them) were reduced by about 30 percent. Their minds couldn’t handle the craving and the new sensory imagery at the same time, so the craving got dumped. Try thinking about what your guy looks like in nothing but a towel—you might forget all about that cookie.

Craving Killer No. 4
SWAP SMART
No one has ever made a longing for a jelly doughnut disappear by glaring on celery sticks. But that doesn’t mean substitutions never work. It’s all about satisfying your appetite. Polivy, Roberts says, is to get the flavor you want with minimal calorie damage. If you can’t stop thinking about caramel corn, try LesserEvil “SinNamin” kettle corn (one cup has about 120 calories and 2 grams of fat). Or, give in to a sweet tooth with fruit—natural sugar can be satisfying. “Sometimes you have to reinvent a sweet,” says Cheryl Forberg, R.D., nutritionist for the TV show The Biggest Loser. Try frozen grapes instead of popcicles and fresh cherries instead of candy.

One caveat: When it comes to chocolate (one of the most-craved foods in the world), it’s better not to accept imitations. A study from the University of Toronto found that chronic dieters didn’t have as much trouble resisting vanilla as they did chocolate. The reason, Polivy says, may be that although vanilla cravings may be satisfied by other flavors, like cinnamon or butterscotch, chocolate is unique—nothing else seems to hit the spot.

When you do indulge, keep an eye on how much. Get your fix in small (about 150-calorie) doses—that’s two chocolate trifles or one snack-size chocolate bar. And don’t tempt yourself by keeping supersize chocolate bars and trays of brownies at the ready—we already know who’ll win that bet.