

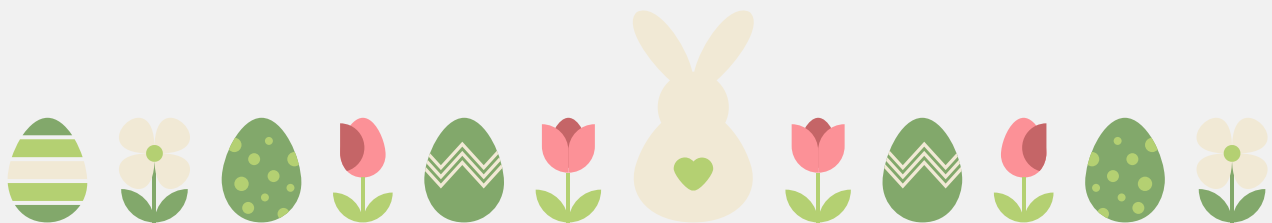
It's Not Just Willpower: Why Easter Chocolate Is Hard to Resist



by Carrie Eckersley (PCN Dietitian)

**Every April I hear the same thing from patients: "I was doing really well...
and then Easter arrived"**

If you've ever felt that way, you're certainly not alone.



Chocolate eggs appear in shops weeks before the holiday. Supermarket displays get bigger and brighter. Friends, family and colleagues give them as gifts. Suddenly chocolate seems to be everywhere.

It can start to feel like a test of willpower.

But interestingly, research into eating behaviour shows that most of our food choices are influenced by our environment rather than pure willpower.

When food is visible, easily available and associated with celebration, we're far more likely to eat it, often without consciously deciding to.

That isn't a personal failing. It's simply how human brains work.

When we understand why our bodies and brains respond to food in certain ways, it becomes much easier to make changes without feeling like we're constantly battling ourselves.



The Food Environment We Live In...

High-energy foods are now:

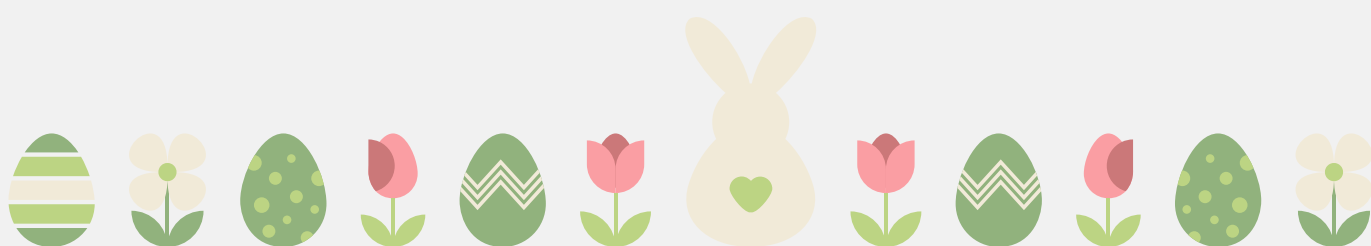
- ***Widely available.***
- ***Heavily marketed.***
- ***Convenient and inexpensive.***
- ***Often sold in larger portions than in the past.***



This is one reason why weight gain has become more common across the population.

Many adults in the UK are now living with excess weight, and supporting people who would like help managing their weight is an important part of improving long-term health and reducing the risk of conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and joint problems.

At the same time, feeling guilty or blaming ourselves about food rarely helps. Understanding the environment we're navigating can help us take a more realistic and compassionate approach to change.



There's Biology Involved Too...



DID YOU KNOW?

There's also a biological reason why foods like chocolate can be difficult to resist.

When we're tired, stressed or busy, our brains naturally look for quick sources of energy and comfort. Sweet, high-energy foods activate reward pathways in the brain, which can make us want more of them.

BUT....

This doesn't mean we lack discipline. It simply reflects how human biology works.

Understanding this can help shift the conversation away from blame and towards something much more helpful: building habits and routines that support our health most of the time.

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS...



Trying to completely avoid certain foods or relying on strict rules often doesn't work in the long run.

Instead, many people find it more helpful to focus on small habits that support balance day to day, such as:

- Eating regular meals so we're not constantly grazing.
- Including foods that help us feel full, such as protein, fibre and vegetables.
- Noticing when treats become an everyday habit rather than an occasional one.
- Building movement into daily life where possible.

These kinds of habits can support weight management over time without making food feel stressful or restrictive.



Enjoying Celebrations Without Guilt...



CELEBRATIONS LIKE EASTER ARE PART OF LIFE. SHARING CHOCOLATE WITH FAMILY OR CHILDREN DOESN'T UNDO HEALTHY HABITS BUILT OVER WEEKS OR MONTHS.

What matters much more is the pattern of our everyday routines.

So if there's a chocolate egg in your kitchen this Easter, enjoy it, and then simply return to the habits that support your health.

Balance over time matters far more than perfection on a single weekend.

Want More Support?

*If you're trying to manage your weight and would like practical, supportive advice, our PCN has created a podcast series called **Beyond the Scales**. The episodes explore topics such as understanding weight gain, why weight loss can plateau, and how small, sustainable changes can support long-term health.*

You can listen to the podcast here:

<https://www.newcastlenorthpcn.nhs.uk/clinical-topics/weight-management/new-podcast-beyond-the-scales/>

