

JUST ONE BISCUIT

But the packet is open

Exploring why an open packet can feel so different, what happens in our mind and how to take the pressure off.

Why does opening the packet change things?

You may have intended to have one biscuit. You open the packet, take one out and sit down. Yet the packet now feels strangely present. You know exactly where it is. You may think about putting it away, taking another, whether you are “allowed” another, or whether leaving it open means you will eventually eat the rest. What began as a simple snack can quickly become a conversation in your head about control.

The open packet is not evidence that you lack willpower. Food is visible, available and easy to reach, and our attention naturally responds to environmental cues. But the intensity of that pull can also be affected by hunger, restriction, habit, distraction, stress and the rules we have learned about food. If biscuits are treated as something scarce, forbidden or dangerous, their availability may feel much louder than it would if they were an ordinary food you trusted yourself to have again.

The difference between a cue and a command

Seeing an open packet can cue a thought or urge: “Have another.” A cue is not a command. But neither does an urge need to be treated as an enemy that must be defeated. You can pause and become curious. Are you still hungry? Did you enjoy the first biscuit? Would another be satisfying? Are you eating because your attention keeps returning to the packet? Are you anxious because you believe that wanting another means you have already lost control?

Sometimes the most distressing part is not eating the biscuit but monitoring yourself while you do it. Counting, bargaining, checking and criticising can make a small food decision consume an enormous amount of mental space. This is particularly relevant for people who have dieted repeatedly, experienced food insecurity, lived with an eating disorder or developed rigid rules around “treat” foods.

Distracted eating and automatic reaching

There is also a different pattern that has little to do with conscious restriction. You may be watching television, working, scrolling or talking and simply keep reaching into the packet. When attention is elsewhere, registering each decision and noticing satisfaction can become harder. That does not make the eating morally wrong. It simply tells us that the environment and our attention are part of the behaviour.

If this happens often and bothers you, experiment with awareness rather than punishment. Notice the taste and texture. Notice when enjoyment changes. Check whether you are hungry, satisfied, still enjoying the food or simply continuing the movement of hand-to-packet. Awareness is useful when it gives you more information; it becomes unhelpful if it turns into another way of policing every mouthful.

The packet does not set the portion

Packaging can quietly influence how we think about food. A packet may contain far more than somebody wants at one sitting, or it may contain an amount they comfortably want to eat. Neither the packet nor a printed serving suggestion can tell an individual exactly what their body needs at that moment. Equally, putting biscuits on a plate is not automatically healthier than eating from the packet. It can simply be a practical tool for somebody who wants a clearer pause point.

A gentle packet check-in

ASK	NOTICE
Did I genuinely only want one, or did I decide one was the maximum I was allowed?	Choice and restriction can sound similar on the outside while feeling very different internally.
What happens when I know the packet is still open?	Notice attention, anxiety, urgency, curiosity and any belief that you must prove you can resist.
Am I hungry or still enjoying the biscuits?	There is no pass-or-fail answer. You are gathering information rather than trying to earn a score.
Am I distracted?	If you want to, bring attention back to eating long enough to notice taste, satisfaction and what you want next.
If I eat another, what do I tell myself?	Words such as weak, greedy, bad or ruined point towards food morality rather than a neutral description of eating.

Taking the pressure off

If the open packet feels like a challenge, try removing the challenge rather than trying harder to win it. Remind yourself that the biscuits can be available again. You do not need to eat them all because today is your only opportunity, and you do not need to avoid them to prove control. If it feels helpful, close the packet and put it away after checking what you actually want. If you still want another, you can make that choice too. The important change is moving away from the idea that there is one correct answer.

Regular, adequate eating can also matter. Strong physical hunger can make highly accessible food understandably compelling. If somebody repeatedly reaches the evening having eaten very little because they were busy, restricting or struggling with appetite, the biscuit packet may be blamed for a response that partly reflects unmet energy needs earlier in the day.

When the packet becomes frightening

If keeping certain foods at home causes intense anxiety, recurrent binge episodes, significant restriction, compensatory behaviours or a feeling that you cannot trust yourself around food, professional support may be helpful. Exposure to feared foods can form part of eating-disorder treatment, but it should be appropriately individualised. Someone with an active eating disorder should not feel they have to prove recovery by facing a multipack alone without adequate support.

A message from me

An open packet of biscuits can look incredibly ordinary to somebody else while creating a whole storm of thoughts for the person sitting beside it. That is why I do not want to reduce this to “just use willpower” or “just put them away.” I want to know what the packet represents. Scarcity? Comfort? A forbidden food? A test? Something you reach for without noticing because your brain is exhausted? When we understand that part, we can work with the person rather than fight the biscuit.

Clinical notes and sources

NICE guideline NG69, Eating disorders: recognition and treatment, provides UK guidance on assessment and treatment of eating disorders. Eating-disorder formulations commonly consider restriction, binge eating, compensatory behaviour, rigid dietary rules and overvaluation of eating, weight or shape. Environmental food cues and attentional factors can also influence eating behaviour. This resource is educational; it does not prescribe a portion size and the number of biscuits eaten does not by itself establish an eating-disorder diagnosis.

Space to Breathe Therapy — Support Hub educational resource. Not a substitute for individual medical, dietetic or psychological assessment.