

How to Stop Hating Your Least Favorite Food

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Cucumbers are my nemesis. I want to fight every food in the melon family and many melon-adjacent foods, but melons avoid my primary disdain because they usually take their rightful place as easily avoidable fruit-salad filler. Cucumbers, though. *Cucumbers*. They hide in all kinds of things that otherwise seem safe to put in my mouth: sushi rolls, salads, sandwiches, the takeout “lunch bowls” that restaurants near my office sell for \$14.

As far as I can remember, I’ve never liked cucumbers, mostly because they taste bad. If they’re present, they’re the first thing I notice, and it’s like someone has sprayed a middle schooler’s eau de toilette from 2002 on my food. Most other people appear to live on slightly different planes of cucumber reality from mine, which I’ve learned over several decades of watching people somehow eat them voluntarily.

My cuke avoidance is what’s known as a food aversion, and although aversions are widespread in the United States, hating a food that others love is socially coded as fussy or unsophisticated. People with many or severe aversions often experience isolating anxiety or social opprobrium. For people like me, it’s more commonly just a nuisance that might inspire an occasional eye roll.

Still, my distaste for such an innocuous food feels vaguely shameful, and after much deliberation, I’m ready to switch sides. I’m ready to *make* myself like cucumbers. Getting there is unlikely to make any huge improvement in my life, but at the very least, I’d like to reroute my energy to a more interesting source of shame. And the good news, according to researchers, is that most people can reset their neural pathways to one day enjoy—or at least tolerate—a nice gazpacho.

Before you can solve a problem, you have to understand what it is: Why is it cucumbers for me, and broccoli or oysters for some other people? There’s no neat explanation, according to Paul Rozin, a psychology professor at the University of Pennsylvania. “The great majority of people have a fair number of things they don’t like,” he says. There is [evidence of genetic differences](#) that make some people more sensitive to certain chemicals in food, but those people might actually prefer the taste of those chemicals. “Sensitivity doesn’t necessarily mean a person will be averse to something,” Rozin explains.