

ON TRACK WITH BARIX

Support to Keep You On Track With a Healthful Lifestyle



How to Manage Mindless Munching

Successful Tips to Conquer the See-food Diet!

It is mind-boggling how the world around us influences what and how much we eat. People are often surprised by the amount that they eat, guessing it to be much less than it actually is. When they learn of the way in which outside influences impact what we eat, they deny that they personally are affected. But these influences are real and can increase our intake by hundreds of calories each day. Even small increases add up over time in a big way. Because these external cues that influence us often fly under our radar, willpower and the desire to eat a healthy diet need some super powers to overcome these stealth forces. Learning about these influences is the first step to putting us in better control of our eating habits. Then we need to arm ourselves with strategies to manage mindless munching and keep our weight goals on track.

We all have a lot of things on our minds every day so it is difficult to be constantly vigilant about what we eat and how much we eat. Availability and ease influence the choice of what we eat, although we generally make conscious decisions about it. The amount of food consumed,

"Everywhere you turn there are donuts in the break room, snack bars at the soccer game, coffee shops at church, popcorn at the movies, and candy bars at the gas station."

though, often runs on autopilot and changes with differing situations. For example, if we usually eat $\frac{1}{2}$ of a bowl of cereal and the size of the bowl doubles, rather than pouring $\frac{1}{4}$ bowl, our tendency is to pour and consume $\frac{1}{2}$ bowl—consuming twice as much. This is an example of something called a consumption norm. Being aware of this shifting norm is essential in moving our eating from automatic to controlled.

When we eat with friends and family members, we tend to eat more. In fact, eating with one other person, rather than alone, increases your intake by 33%. Eating with several other people doubles your intake. Why is this? First, you are influenced by what others choose to eat. If your eating partner(s) choose less healthy foods and dessert, you are more likely to follow. And people do

tend to be less careful about what they eat in these situations. In addition, the length of time spent eating is often longer when dining with others and longer meals translate to greater food intake.

Seeing food is a cue to eat—often joked about as the see-food diet. And it's true, when food is right in front of you, you eat more. Studies show that having an opaque covered dish with candy sitting on your desk is sure to encourage mindless munching, but putting the candy in clear dish, fully visible, doubles the indulgence. It may be hard to find situations in your day when food is not clearly visible. Everywhere you turn there are donuts in the break room, snack bars at the soccer game, coffee shops at church, popcorn at the movies, and candy bars at the gas station. On top of that, you watch a TV show to relax and you are inundated with images of appetizing foods. All throughout the day, seeing food encourages eating.

Overeating is encouraged by large packaging and an abundance of food. In the last 30 years, there has been a consistent trend towards bigger packages and

bigger portions. And most of us have an abundance of food available to us. Large containers of food promote larger portions, because when you eat from a large container, say a bag of pretzels, there has to be a conscious decision for you to stop eating. The tendency is to continue eating until there is some cue, such as you feel full, the bag is empty, or the book is finished to stop your eating; if not, you continue to eat. This is in direct contrast to eating from single-portion packages. In this case you need to make a decision about opening up another package to eat more. The eating behavior goes from automatic noshing to a conscious choice.

Portions served and a greater variety of foods are other influences. Restaurants provide large portions which we have come to accept as normal. When given a larger portion, people eat 31–50% more food than when a smaller portion is given, and when asked about how much they ate, there is no difference between the two groups. So the perception of how much is eaten is skewed by portion size. The same thing happens when offered a greater variety of food; consumption goes up. One study showed that people ate a third more when offered three flavors of yogurt compared to one flavor. When multiple colors of jelly beans are offered, people eat more than when a single color is offered.

Studies show that we eat more when food is easily available and requires little, if any, effort to prepare. Until the industrial age, it took a lot of effort to get a meal on the table. Today, pizza delivery, the fast food drive thru, and microwave bagel bites have replaced planting, harvesting, and making food from scratch. Modern day convenience foods help us with our hectic lifestyles but may impact our waistlines more than we realize.

(Continued on page 3)

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES	
EATING WITH OTHERS	Decide what to eat ahead of time.
	Decide to be the influencer—consciously eat small portions of healthy foods and take pride in the fact that unconsciously others are eating better too.
	Bring a no-added-sugar dessert, calorie-free drinks, a healthy entrée or side dish to gatherings to minimize the impact of increased intake.
	Sip on a cup of hot tea or decaf coffee to prolong the enjoyment of a meal without overeating.
FOOD IN SIGHT	Put healthy foods that you want your family to enjoy out in the open and in the front of the refrigerator and freezer.
	Don't put bowls and platters of food on the table. You will think twice if you have to get up to refill your plate.
	Put tempting foods in opaque containers or wrap in foil to make less visible.
	Leave your protein powder and blender on the counter as a visual cue—this should work with vitamins too.
	Leave an insulated lunch bag on your desk to remind you to eat your snack.
	Record your favorite shows and then fast forward through the commercials or busy yourself during the commercials by folding laundry, sorting mail or other tasks.
	Avoid food cues by paying for gas at the pump, eat snacks at your desk to avoid the break room, etc.
LARGE PACKAGING	Have healthy food alternatives with you so that when you get the urge to eat, you have a healthy option within easy reach.
	Repack food to single-serving containers or zippered bags right away.
	When buying in bulk, put excess food out of sight in another area of the house.
LARGE PORTIONS	Put foods from large containers into several smaller plastic storage containers. Not only will portion size shrink, but foods will stay fresher.
	Get a to-go container at the beginning of a restaurant meal and put a good part of the meal aside before beginning to eat.
	Ask for bread to be served with the meal instead of before or pass the bread basket once and then have it removed.
	Use tall, narrow glasses, smaller plates, bowls and serving utensils.
	Always portion food into a serving bowl rather than eating from a bag or box.
	Keep it simple and just eat a couple of foods for each meal.
LOW EFFORT = LARGER PORTIONS	Measure portions and plate foods at the counter before taking to the table.
	Plan ahead and have healthful foods and beverages easily available. If these are easier to get, the desire to eat less healthful foods can be overcome.
	Use the crock pot and have dinner waiting at home to resist the urge to order out.
	Pack meals and snacks and take with you.
	Plan meals ahead and shop once a week.
	Share the effort of meal prep and clean-up with family members.
	Research the nutritional values of fast food items, pizza, and your typical carry-out foods. Then make a conscious choice about what to order and how much to eat ahead of time.
DISTRACTED EATING	Only buy healthful foods. If you have to run to the store for a junk food fix, you may just opt for one of the healthy options that you have on hand.
	Chew gum, suck on hard candy or sip on a sugar-free beverage rather than eating while engaging in distracting activities.
	If you need to eat while distracted, portion food in single-serving amounts.
	Break the cycle of associating food with activities. Go to the movies and don't get popcorn. After a few times, the association should diminish.
	At one meal per day, just eat. Focus on the taste, smells, textures and enjoyment of the meal.

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Another major player in modern-day environmental eating influence is distraction. Really, when was the last time that you sat down to eat and just ate? The distractions are numerous: movies, phones, driving, computers, TVs, social events, conversing with others, reading, writing, even making out a grocery list. It is rare for most of us to take the time to focus on and slowly savor the tastes and textures of a well-prepared meal. Not only do distractions put eating into an automatic behavior mode, they often extend the eating period, increasing intake. Finally, distractions become associated with specific foods—popcorn at the theater, hot dogs at the ball park, chips while watching TV, and candy while reading so that the distraction itself leads to the initiation of eating. In our distraction-rich environment with an abundance of food, we are likely to perceive our food intake inaccurately and overeat.

There are other subtle environmental cues too. Soft lighting and pleasant music often enhance the enjoyment and prolong the length of the meal resulting in greater food consumption. People tend to eat more in cooler weather. Portion perceptions are impacted by the size and shape of dinnerware. Thin, tall glasses give the perception of a larger portion as do smaller plates, bowls and eating utensils.

Following weight loss surgery, people are very aware of what and how much they are eating. They are very vigilant about their food intake and these environmental influences typically are not as strong. But, as time goes on, the focus shifts from eating. As weight is lost, energy increases and other activities and pursuits become more interesting, eating may go back to autopilot mode again—at least to some degree. And these environmental influences are once again in control.

Now, knowing what we know, let's use a little science and effort to get our environment to work for us instead of against us. Our minds are busy and we cannot expect them to make healthy conscious decisions hundreds of times a day about our food intake—so let's set up our environment to help us out and give will-power and the desire to eat a healthy diet a hefty boost.



It Worked for Me

Rockin' Roll bars really help me keep control my cravings for sweets. I cut the bars up into bite-sized pieces, wrap each square in a piece of plastic wrap and freeze them. When I get the urge, I pop one frozen piece in my mouth and just suck on it. It takes a while for it to thaw and I am enjoying the nutty taste the entire time. As it thaws, it becomes even chewier than when not frozen and tastes better. An entire bar is way too much for me to eat all at one time, even in halves. The small frozen pieces are perfect and take care of my sweet tooth. The bars last longer this way too.

Lyn A.



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Recipes

Smothered Chicken Breasts

- 4–6 oz chicken breast halved, boneless, skinless
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon lemon-pepper seasoning
- 1 Tbsp vegetable oil
- ¼ cup Oscar Mayer Real Bacon Bits
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- ¼ cup apple juice
- ½ cup shredded Colby-Jack cheese

Sprinkle chicken with salt and lemon-pepper. Place oil in a large non-stick skillet and cook chicken for 15 minutes or until juices run clear. Move to a foil-lined 9 x 13 pan and cover.

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Rinse and dry the skillet. Sauté onion in apple juice until the onion is golden. Top chicken with bacon bits, onion and cheese. Place in oven for 10 minutes. Enjoy. Makes 8 small servings.

NUTRITION INFORMATION

PER SERVING: 203 calories, 30 grams protein, 8 grams fat, 2 grams carbohydrate, 289 mg sodium.



Lemon Almond Bars

- 1 1/3 cup almonds, dry roasted, unsalted, whole
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- 9 packets SLENDA® No Calorie Sweetener
- 4 eggs, large, separated
- 2 tsp grated lemon rind
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 pinch salt
- ½ tsp lemon juice



Grind almonds in a food processor with sugar. Set aside.

In a medium-sized bowl, beat egg yolks, 4 packets of SLENDA, lemon rind, cinnamon, vanilla extract, baking soda, oil, and salt until light-colored and thick. Stir in almond mixture.

In a separate bowl, beat egg whites until soft peaks form. Gradually add lemon juice and remaining SLENDA, beating until stiff but not dry. Very carefully fold beaten egg whites into almond mixture until combined.

Transfer batter to a long loaf pan, which has been lined with wax paper and greased. Bake at 375 degrees F for about 35 minutes, or until tester comes out clean. Cool and turn out onto a plate. Remove wax paper. Cut into bars. Makes 12 servings.

NUTRITION INFORMATION

PER SERVING: 138 calories, 5 grams protein, 12 grams fat, 4 grams carbohydrate, 136 mg sodium.

In the News

A higher protein diet which includes dairy products promotes muscle mass gain and belly fat loss when part of a reduced-calorie diet and exercise program.

This study compared three groups of overweight women. All groups participated in five days of aerobic exercise and two days of strength training each week for four months. The women ate diets with differing amounts of protein, carbohydrates and dairy products.

The women all lost the same amount of weight, but those who consumed more dairy products and protein gained muscle mass and lost more belly fat. This was in contrast to the lower-protein and lower-dairy-product diet in which participants lost muscle mass. The study authors concluded that this significant change in body composition may help people to maintain weight loss.



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Tips must be submitted by October 31, 2011. Please send comments, ideas, recipes and "It Worked For Me" tips to Deb Hart, RD, LD at dhart@foresthealth.com.