



Setting up Your Environment for Success

No doubt about it, our environments are filled with opportunities to consume inexpensive, convenient, and large portions of food and beverages, which encourages us to eat more than we need to be trim and healthy. Food is everywhere. It is difficult to go anywhere without encountering several opportunities to purchase food. And when was the last time that you went to a social engagement, church meeting or family gathering that wasn't centered on food? What food choices do you find when you open your cupboards or refrigerator at home?

Rather than counting on “willpower” to guide your food choices, a well thought out plan will set up your environment for success. This plan needs to include planning meals and snacks in advance, purchasing those foods so they will be available and limiting your access to problem foods.

Step 1, Plan

The first component of setting up your environment for success is to plan meals and snacks in advance. This will assure that there will be easy access to healthful foods and beverages throughout the day. Instead of keeping your mind focused on what you will be eating all day, planning frees you to have healthful foods available when you need them. You don't need to worry about running out to a fast food restaurant on your lunch hour, stopping by the grocery store nightly on your way home, or wandering to the vending machines in hopes of finding a healthful snack there. Your meals and snacks will be planned out. Your chances of having a healthful, low-fat, no-added-sugar meal are much greater if you plan ahead.

Take the time, once a week (or do an entire month at a time) to plan your meals and snacks. If you are planning for a family, take into consideration their activity schedules. It may not make sense to plan a time-consuming meal on the busiest night of the week. If you are on a budget (and who isn't), make out your meal plan when the grocery store sales flyer arrives so you can take advantage of the weekly specials. You will want to select recipes in advance to help make a shopping list. Plan meals and snacks to eat both at work and at home. Include the meals/snacks that you will eat at fast food or sit down restaurants. Think “SIMPLE” when planning your meals/snacks. Most people like to eat their favorite meals a few times each month.

Step 2, Shop/Prepare

The second step is simply to go to the grocery store and purchase the foods on your list. Then pack up your meals and snacks for work. Take lunches and snacks for the entire week on Monday or pack your meals/snacks the night before. In the morning, you may be too rushed.

Step 3, Limit Access to Problem Foods

The third step is to limit your access to problem foods. Problem foods are foods that you really like that are high in fat and added sugar, and that are difficult for you to eat in tiny quantities. First, you must become conscious of the opportunities for temptation—the times you're faced with the chance to consume a problem food. Then put steps into place that will limit your exposure to these opportunities. Evaluate your environment this week and find strategies to set yourself up for success. As you go through your daily activities, mentally note the opportunities for consuming problem foods. You may want to make a list throughout the week. Then find a strategy for each opportunity. Here are some examples:

- Pay for gas at the pump to limit your exposure to foods found at convenience stores.
- Avoid fast food restaurants or use the drive-through with a meal planned in advance.
- Do not keep tempting sugar-laden or high fat foods in your home.
- Ask the members of your church group to nix the snacks and each bring their own beverage instead. Chances are you are not the only one watching your weight.
- Take your favorite sugar free dessert to social gatherings. You'll have something to feel good about eating and the other guests will most likely be surprised at how good sugar free can taste--if you choose to tell them it's sugar free.
- Avoid the break room at work when problem foods are present.
- Pack a lunch from home and eat at your desk to limit your exposure to the cafeteria or vending machine offerings. Do stop your work and focus on enjoying your meal.
- Pack a low-fat, low-sugar protein bar or other snacks for trips to avoid airport or convenience fare.
- Avoid the kitchen except at meal and snack time. Keep food only in the kitchen.
- Limit your eating to one room in your home. Make yourself sit down to eat. Focus on enjoying your meal or snack. Eat slowly.
- Do not eat while watching TV, reading, surfing the net or doing any other activity.
- Purchase foods in small single serving sizes. Bulk packaging begs overindulgence.
- Find no-added-sugar alternatives for your favorite sweets. Enjoy these occasionally as a treat.

Step 4, Check Attitude

One of the most effective ways to avoid problem foods is to change your attitude towards them so that they aren't problems any longer. When you find yourself desiring a problem food, think about how that food has damaged your weight loss efforts in the past. Realize that the more you avoid a problem food, the less you will desire it. This happens all the time when someone makes a significant effort to cut down on salty foods, fatty foods or

sweet foods. After you've avoided the food for a while, it won't taste good when you do try it. It will taste too salty, too greasy, or sickeningly sweet.

Limiting your access to problem foods is a strategy that will make it easier for you to switch to better eating habits. It may be difficult at first, but does get easier with time. Do not think of it as denying yourself the pleasure of eating. Think of it as breaking the chains that the problem food has on you. **You deserve the pleasure of eating healthful foods, not the consequences of an unhealthy diet.**

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