

Weight - The Reality Series
Becoming Weight Wise



Why We Eat What We Eat

Many people eat for reasons other than hunger, which is a primary reason American waistlines are growing larger. To successfully manage our weight we must develop a healthy relationship with food.



The way we think of food has been a part of us since we were born. We grew up in times where cleaning your plate was a must—not only to get dessert but because “there are starving children in other countries.”

We have grown to love foods our mothers or grandmothers cooked for us. We were rewarded for our triumphs with ice cream sundaes, and scolded for not eating our spinach. We were taught that to comfort someone, you offer food. A death, illness, or birth in the family was a cue to start cooking and to start eating.

When you are stressed, bored, or anxious, is food the only comfort? Many people eat for reasons other than hunger, which is a primary reason American waistlines are growing larger. To successfully manage our weight we must develop a healthy relationship with food.

Why Do We Overeat?

If hunger was the only motivation to eat, then the eating process would consist of the physical cue to eat, finding and eating food, and stopping at the first sign of being full. However, that can't explain cravings, “munchies,” or overeating. Appetite comes from not only being hungry but also from the sensory qualities of foods and individual food preferences. Even satiety, the feeling of fullness, has both physical and mental aspects. It is this combination of physical and psychological circumstances that can lead us to overeat.

People on quick-fix diets and those who tend to skip meals to save calories are doing themselves a disservice. When you skip breakfast (or lunch or dinner), your cravings are likely to increase and resistance to high-fat, sugary, or salty foods will be much lower than if you had eaten. The plan to save calories eventually backfires and you overeat later in the day, and eat less nutritious foods.

Bigger Isn't Better

Today's serving sizes are larger than they were 10 to 20 years ago. **The average portion size of pasta is approximately 4 cups;** a standard serving size is ½ cup. So eating pasta and bread at a restaurant can easily supply all the grain servings for a whole day.

Have Fiber, Feel Full

People who eat diets rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains tend to have a healthier weight. Foods that have a high fiber and water content, such as fruits and vegetables, have fewer calories than their high-fat, low-fiber counterparts. People feel fuller after eating these fiber-rich foods, and they consume fewer calories.

How to Manage Your Weight

Foods with high fiber and water content, such as fruits and vegetables, will fill you faster and contain fewer calories. The bottom line is to increase fruits and vegetables and to decrease grains to help you cut calories.



Eating for All the Wrong Reasons

The situations and emotions that trigger us to eat fall into five categories. They are:

- Social eating when around other people, for whatever reason.
- Responsive eating because you are stressed, anxious, depressed, lonely, or bored.
- Situational eating because the opportunity has presented itself, whether it be passing a bakery, watching TV, attending a sporting event, or going to the movies.
- Emotional eating because you feel you are not worthy or have a low self-esteem.
- Physiological eating in response to physical cues.

Emotional eating has become so common that people find it as natural and unavoidable as the physiological reasons we eat. Women tend to be more susceptible to emotional eating than men.

In American culture, food has become the most tangible symbol for love and nurturing. All our major cultural holidays and events revolve around food. Just look at how we celebrate Christmas, Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and the Superbowl, just to name a few. Socializing and celebrating have become reasons to eat. Our culture has become confused, associating food with emotions, rewards, and social support. We need to identify non-food ways to meet our emotional, social, and other needs.

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Advice for Emotional Eaters

For many people, an eating plan is not enough to combat other motivations to eat. When emotional eaters “give in” to that bag of cookies or potato chips, they may feel they have “blown their diet” and proceed to eat the whole bag. There is no need to give up, though. By following the tips listed, emotional eaters can find outlets for their psychological cues to eat. It is important to keep trying.

- Never use the word “diet.” The term generally implies that you will give up something completely or that at some point you will no longer need to watch your weight.

Instead, think of weight management and develop realistic, positive changes that can become a part of your daily routine for life.

- Don’t think all or nothing. Weight management is not about giving up the foods you love. It is about eating in moderation, even allowing for a special treat every day.
- Learn portion control. We have strayed from the recommended serving sizes and have become used to larger portions. Try measuring standard servings of foods for a while to learn what a portion looks like in your dishes.

Portion Control Tips

One Serving	Visualize the Size
Meat	Your palm or a deck of cards
Fruit	A tennis ball
Veggies	An ice-cream scoop
Potato, baked	A bar of soap
Pasta	A fist
Rice	A cupcake wrapper
Bagel or biscuit	A 6-ounce can of tuna
Muffin	A standard lightbulb
Teaspoon	A quarter or the tip of your thumb
Tablespoon	A teabag
Ounce	Pair of dice, size of thumb



Don't skip the most important meal of the day. Eating a healthful breakfast sets the stage and decreases your afternoon cravings for those not-so-good-for-you snacks

- Identify what triggers you to eat and develop a plan. If emotional eating is a major roadblock to successful weight management, keep a food journal. Every time you get the urge to eat, record it in your journal. Write down how you were feeling, what happened during the day, where you were when the urge hit, and any other information you may find useful in identifying your triggers. You may find that whenever you are at a party and food is readily available you graze all night, or that if you are sad or anxious, that gallon of ice cream just calls your name. Once you determine what causes you to eat when you are not hungry, try to develop attractive alternatives: read a book, go shopping, talk to a friend, play with your children or pets, take a bubble bath, exercise, or any other activity that you may find enjoyable.
- Don't skip the most important meal of the day. Eating a healthful breakfast sets the stage and decreases your afternoon cravings for those not-so-good-for-you snacks. Eating breakfast can also help you avoid that after lunch lull in your day. Some people find that a protein-rich breakfast works best for them.

Remember

Managing weight is a very individualized process. To be successful, you must find what works for you and what you find enjoyable other than food! It is important to remember to take things slowly, starting with one lifestyle change at a time. Only after each new change has been mastered and has become part of your daily routine should you move on to another. Emotional eating is "curable," but it will take some work to identify what makes you eat what you eat. By keeping a food journal, emotional eaters (and overeaters in general) can begin to put their eating habits into perspective and develop a different way to achieve a healthy weight.

Reference

Somer, Elizabeth. *Food and Mood: The Complete Guide to Eating Well and Feeling Your Best*. 2nd Edition. Henry Holt and Company: New York 1999.

Reflect, Replace, Reinforce:

A process for improving your eating habits

Create a list of your eating habits. Keeping a food diary for a few days, in which you write down everything you eat and the time of day you ate it, will help you uncover your habits. For example, you might discover that you always seek a sweet snack to get you through the mid-afternoon energy slump. Use this diary to help: http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/pdf/Food_Diary_CDC.pdf. It's good to note how you were feeling when you decided to eat, especially if you were eating when not hungry. Were you tired? Stressed out?

Highlight the habits that may be leading you to overeat.

Common eating habits that can lead to weight gain are:

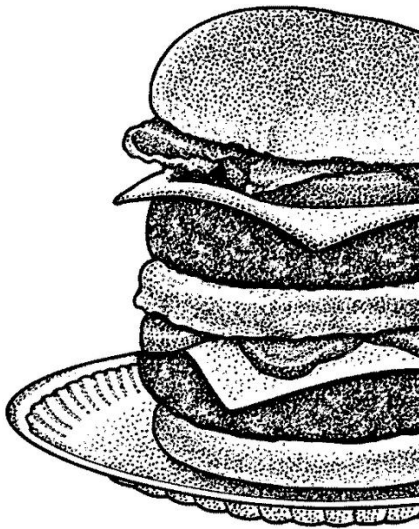
- Eating too fast
- Always cleaning your plate
- Eating when not hungry
- Eating while standing up (may lead to eating mindlessly or too quickly)
- Always eating dessert
- Skipping meals (or maybe just breakfast)

Look at the unhealthy eating habits you've highlighted. Be sure you've identified all the triggers that cause you to engage in those habits. Identify a few you'd like to work on improving first.

Don't forget to pat yourself on the back for the things you're doing right. Maybe you almost always eat fruit for dessert, or you drink low-fat or fat-free milk. These are good habits! Recognizing your successes will help encourage you to make more changes.

My Food Diary Day _____

Meal/Snack (Indicate time of day)	What You Ate and Drank	Where and With Whom	Notes (Feelings, hunger, etc.)
Breakfast			
Snack			
Lunch			
Snack			
Dinner			



Often an environmental “cue”, or a particular emotional state, is what encourages eating for non-hunger reasons.

Create a list of “cues” by reviewing your food diary to become more aware of when and where you’re “triggered” to eat for reasons other than hunger. Note how you are typically feeling at those times. Often an environmental “cue,” or a particular emotional state, is what encourages eating for non-hunger reasons.

Common triggers for eating when not hungry are:

- Opening up the cabinet and seeing your favorite snack food.
- Sitting at home watching television.
- Before or after a stressful meeting or situation at work.
- Coming home after work and having no idea what’s for dinner.
- Having someone offer you a dish they made “just for you!”
- Walking past a candy dish on the counter.
- Sitting in the break room beside the vending machine.
- Seeing a plate of doughnuts at the morning staff meeting.
- Swinging through your favorite drive-through every morning.
- Feeling bored or tired and thinking food might offer a pick-me-up.

Circle the “cues” on your list that you face on a daily or weekly basis. Going home for the Thanksgiving holiday may be a trigger for you to overeat, and eventually, you want to have a plan for as many eating cues as you can. But for now, focus on the ones you face more often.

Ask yourself these questions for each “cue” you’ve circled:

- Is there anything I can do to avoid the cue or situation? This option works best for cues that don’t involve others. For example, could you choose a different route to work to avoid stopping at a fast food restaurant on the way? Is there another place in the break room where you can sit so you’re not next to the vending machine?
- For things I can’t avoid, can I do something differently that would be healthier? Obviously, you can’t avoid all situations that trigger your unhealthy eating habits, so in these situations, evaluate your options. Could you suggest or bring healthier snacks or beverages? Could you offer to take notes to distract your attention? Could you sit farther away from the food so it won’t be as easy to grab something? Could you plan ahead and eat a healthful snack before the meeting?

Replace unhealthful habits with new, healthful ones. For example, in reflecting upon your eating habits, you may realize that you eat too fast when you eat alone. So, make a commitment to share a lunch each week with a colleague, or have a neighbor over for dinner one night a week. Other strategies might include putting your fork down between bites or minimizing other distractions (i.e. watching the news during dinner) that might keep you from paying attention to how quickly—and how much—you're eating. Here are more ideas to help you replace unhealthy habits:

- Eat more slowly. If you eat too quickly, you may “clean your plate” instead of paying attention to whether your hunger is satisfied.
- Eat only when you're truly hungry instead of when you are tired, anxious, or feeling an emotion besides hunger. If you find yourself eating when you are experiencing an emotion besides hunger, such as boredom or anxiety, try to find a non-eating activity to do instead. You may find a quick walk or phone call with a friend helps you feel better.
- Plan meals ahead of time to ensure that you eat a healthy well-balanced meal.

Reinforce your new, healthy habits and be patient with yourself. Habits take time to develop. Improvement doesn't happen overnight. When you do find yourself engaging in an unhealthful habit, stop as quickly as possible and ask yourself: Why do I do this? When did I start doing this? What changes do I need to make? Be careful not to berate yourself or think that one mistake “blows” a whole day's worth of healthful habits. You can do it! Take one day at a time!

Source:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/losing_weight/eating_habits.html



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