

INSPIRED

To Make Healthy Choices

Being mindful that our eating habits are affected by external cues is not enough to prevent overeating.

Willpower doesn't help much, either.

The key to "healthy eating" is understanding how external cues affect us and creating an environment to help us manage them.

There are many external cues that affect how much we eat.

Some of them are:

- **Serving size of the food** (the more we are served, the more we eat);
- **Size of plates and bowls** (if they are bigger, we will eat more);
- **Packaging;**
- **Names given to food items** (chocolate cake vs. Belgian Black Forest Cake);
- **Location of food** (the easier food is to obtain, or if it is in sight, the more likely we are to eat it);
- **Who we dine with** (we eat more when we dine with fast eaters);
- **Where we eat** (we tend to eat more if the serving dishes are placed on the dinner table than in the kitchen);
- **At a buffet, if we stand behind a larger person**, we tend to accumulate more food on our plates reasoning that, "I'm not that heavy, so I can afford to take a lot of food."

Also, if we perceive a restaurant to be healthier (Subway vs. McDonald's), we tend to underestimate the number of calories in a meal from the "healthier" restaurant. More often, we add chips, a full-calorie soda and a cookie to the "healthy" meal.

Low-fat foods also fall under the health halo. **When people were given a food they thought was low-fat, they consumed 21-46% more calories.** People feel they deserve more because they are eating low-fat foods.

Exercise can indirectly and directly affect what we eat and how much. When reasonably active exercisers were shown exercise advertisements prior to a meal, **they ate less.** The ads apparently reminded the exercisers how much work they would have to do to burn a certain number of calories. **Perception matters!**

The key to managing external cues is how we set up our environment. Environmental factors such as package size, plate shape, variety and social interactions influence our eating decisions more than we may realize. For instance, if we see a healthier food first, we're more likely to choose it.

Try these tips to avoid overeating:

- Use smaller dishes.
- Put your fork down between bites.
- Keep serving dishes of food on the counter or stove rather than on the dinner table.
- Purchase 100-calorie packs to help limit calorie intake.
- Transfer bulk items like snacks to serving size containers.
- Keep healthy foods easily accessible. Place healthy snacks on the kitchen counter and at the front of the pantry or fridge.
- Serve fruits and vegetables in appealing (colorful and decorative) dishes.

Don't depend solely on your self-control to avoid overeating.

Set your environment up for success!

Check out mindlesseating.org for more information and current research.

Gender and mood can influence how much and what type of foods you eat.

The visibility and convenience of foods impacts our consumption.

Large package sizes increase average of 22%.

For more information:
Controlling External Cues
www.guideinc.org

