Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life*

Each of us makes more than 200 nearly subconscious food choices every day. We are nudged more by our eating environment than by deliberate choices. By changing our environment, we will start to eat better without really thinking about it.

If you are a typical American, you buy or eat more than 80% of all your food within 5 miles. This is your “food radius”—your food neighborhood. What matters within this radius is your home, your “go-to” restaurants, your weekly grocery store, where you work, and where your kids go to school. If you can change the things you do in these places—or ask them to change for yourself and others, you will not have to think about them again.

**Decide on one or two changes that you can stick to each day, for at least 25 days out of the month, to form a new habit**, rather than deciding on a bunch of changes that become overwhelming.

**Changing Your Eating Environment at Home:**

What foods are sitting on your kitchen counters? Breakfast cereals, crackers, chips, colas and soft drinks, and/or cookies? What about fruit? Dr Wansink’s Syracuse study showed that the researchers could predict a person’s weight by the food sitting out on the counter. Having fruit on the counter was acceptable, but weight predictions increased with cereals, crackers, chips, soft drinks, and cookies. *We eat what we see, not what we don’t.*

*But an empty kitchen is not good either. If you have an empty kitchen, it may be because you eat all of your meals out—away from your home. And it is easy to overeat in other places.*

What about your kitchen? The more you hang out in your kitchen, the more you will eat and drink more. Removing the television and comfortable seating from the kitchen means that you will spend less time in the kitchen. You will do less munching (snacking), and your meal prep will become more efficient.
Research has shown that we eat the most visible foods first and also the most. The best thing you can do is not have food sitting out in the kitchen. If you have open shelves, display anything but food on these shelves. If you have clear cupboards, this is a great place for your dishes instead of food.

You are three times more likely to eat the first food you see in the cupboard than the fifth one, so rearrange your cupboard, pantry, and refrigerator so that the first foods you see are the best for you.

When you open your refrigerator, have the healthy foods at eye level…...perhaps cut up veggies or fruit for you to grab.

When eating a meal or a snack, use a small plate which is easier than reminding yourself to take less from a larger plate. You also eat more from a larger serving dish than a smaller one, and you eat more from a larger serving spoon than a smaller one.

Over the years, sizes of plates have gotten larger. Recipe servings are larger, too, and thus have more calories. In Joy of Cooking, the 1937 version of a serving of chili was 341 calories compared to 514 calories in 2006.

If your plate is the same color as the food, you will serve yourself 18% more, so use plates that contrast with the color of your food.

You pour more juice into a bigger glass than a smaller one, and you pour more in a wider one than a narrow one of the same size. So when it comes to setting your dining room table, think small plates, small serving plates, small serving spoons, and small glasses.

If you are a wine drinker, you pour 12 percent less wine into a taller white wine glass that holds 10 ounces than you pour into wider red wine glass that holds the same. When you look down at a glass, it looks more full then when you look at it from the same level as the liquid. As a result, you pour 12% less in a glass when it is sitting on the table compared to when you are holding it. And, because red wine is easier to see than white wine, you pour 9% less red wine whenever you pour a glass of it.

Big package stores such as Costco offer bargains, but if you buy in bulk, you eat that food faster, and, in greater quantities, than you otherwise would have. A solution is to repackag...
baggie sizes. Another solution is to store that food as far away from reach as possible such as in the basement or some distant cupboard. You will get the cost savings without the calories.

Is this true for you? Guys are speed eaters compared to the rest of the family. They inhale their food, then wait around for the family to finish their dinners. So, then guys take seconds of the foods closest to them, and, then thirds of their favorites.

If you are serving family style, it is best to pre-serve food from the stove or counter. Those people ate 19% less total food, compared to those who served themselves right off the table.

Keep the TV off while you eat.

**Snacking:**

You can make snacking less convenient and less enjoyable……but how? To uncover these eating traps, replay everything you ate yesterday, even the piece of free sample of food at the grocery store. Then, keep a list for 3 or 4 days, and you will start to see two or three little eating patterns you can tweak to make these patterns less convenient.

What about multitasking while eating? Do you eat while at your computer, or in front of the TV or while reading a book? Multitasking means “one armed eating” when you gravitate to finger foods that you can easily, and mindlessly eat, with one hand.

What if you told yourself you would only eat at the kitchen table while snacking? It may not be as interesting as being in front of the TV, but with your new rule of eating only at the kitchen table, you may, in time, eat less.

In one study, half of the leftovers from a party were wrapped in either clear plastic wrap or put in clear plastic containers. The other half were wrapped in aluminum foil or put in opaque containers. Within 2 days, the leftovers in the clearly wrapped leftovers were gone. The most nonvisible leftovers were still there after 10 days. So, the healthier a food is, the clearer the packaging you should use to store it—plastic wrap or clear glass for the good stuff, and aluminum foil for the rest.
Eating Away from Home:
At a buffet, scout out the foods on the buffet table before even picking up a plate, then select only your favorites. After taking your plate of food, sit farther away from the buffet table, not facing it, which makes going back for seconds less convenient and less tempting. In a Chinese buffet, use chopsticks rather than a fork, select a smaller plate, and chew each bite an average of 15 times (or at least try to chew your food with more bites rather than less). At a buffet, diners who are heavier tend to pick up a plate and go directly to the buffet without scanning the foods on the buffet table. They select a larger plate, and once they have their food, they tend to sit closer to the buffet, and if in a Chinese restaurant, they use a fork.

If you are in an office setting, move the candy dish across the room to resist it when it is on your desk. In a study, when candy dishes were moved from the desks of 40 administrative assistants into their desks, the average assistant ate 74 fewer calories every day, the equivalent of not gaining 5 to 6 pounds over the next year.

You may have your unique way of changing a habit to eat less. Here are some examples of changes that others have made are:
Don’t become so absorbed in a project that you forget to eat a meal. (What happens when you get really, really hungry?)
Fill the candy dish with paper clips.
Counteract the mid-afternoon slump with a nap rather than grabbing a bunch of cookies or crackers.
Throw out the stale chips.
Try all the buffet salads leaving room for only one dessert.
Seek out an interesting party conversation rather than the hors d’oeuvres.
Bring a few cookies into the TV room instead of the whole package.

What one or two changes will you make in your environment to be more healthful?

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