

LifeStyle Skills



Eating Triggers

For New Direction and OutLook Weight Control Programs

When you complete this module, you will be able to . . .

- Identify visual and situational cues to eating
- Learn strategies to help you control your eating triggers

People eat for many reasons. The sight or smell of food, time of day, social events and activities, and certain feelings or moods can trigger the urge to eat even when we're not physically hungry. This module will discuss the visual cues and situations that could lead to overeating. Feelings, as an eating trigger, are discussed in the module, *Emotional Eating*.

Eating behaviors which have little to do with physical hunger you are the focus of this module. For example, you walk into the movie theater and must have popcorn, or every Saturday after your son's baseball game, you stop for ice cream. Here, an event or circumstance becomes the signal to eat instead of hunger.

What signals you to eat? The sight or smell of good food is a powerful trigger. Visual cues, like passing by the candy dish in the living room, seeing scrumptious pictures of food in a magazine or on TV, or smelling the aroma of freshly baked bread can tempt you from staying in control. The time of day could also signal you to eat. For instance, when the clock strikes noon, you want lunch; at 3:00 PM you head to the vending machine at work. If you eat according to the clock, ask yourself, "Is it physical hunger or habit that's driving me to eat?" Certain people trigger eating, since meeting with friends, family or colleagues is often associated with food. Some activities are also a cue to eat. For instance, do you automatically eat when you watch TV, read a book or newspaper, or drive in the car?

Consider the circumstances that signal your desire for food. By deciding to prevent these visual cues and situations from becoming a reason to eat, you're taking an important step in learning how to handle your food triggers. Here are some strategies to help you gain control.

To decrease visual temptations:

- *Plan ahead.* Plan in advance what you're going to eat for the day. Decide which foods should be kept out of sight or out of the house, to help you stick with your daily plan.
- *Shop from a list.* Stick to the items on the shopping list to avoid impulse buying. Skip the aisles that don't contain foods on your list.
- *Shop when you're not hungry.* Shopping on a full stomach will guard against impulse purchases, like grabbing a candy bar at the check-out line, and will help prevent you from buying more food than you planned.
- *Keep problem foods out of sight.* Hide tempting foods in rarely opened cabinets or in the back of the refrigerator. Remove the candy dishes around the house or from the desk at work. Designate a cabinet for your kids' snacks and make the contents off-limits to you.
- *Keep healthier foods within easy reach.* Place nutritious foods, like cut-up raw veggies, fresh fruit or nonfat yogurt in the front of the refrigerator. Keep lower-calorie substitutions of tempting foods on hand. For example, have sugar-free fudge pops instead of a chocolate bar, or a mini bagel with light strawberry jam instead of a jelly donut.