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Mindful Eating

Ever eat a whole bag of chips when you're not even hungry? If so, count yourself among the millions who are victims of mindless eating. That's the phrase coined by Cornell University food psychologist Brian Wansink, PhD, to describe subconscious eating habits that can lead to unnecessary weight gain. The good news: You can turn mindless eating into mindlessly eating better -- and maybe even weight loss -- simply by making little changes such as eating off smaller plates, he tells WebMD.

Larger Plate = Larger Meal

One problem, at least in the U.S., is that our eyes really are bigger than our stomachs, his tests suggest.

"We asked 150 Parisians how they knew they were through with dinner and they said, 'When we're full.' When we asked 150 Chicagoans the same question, they said, 'When the plate is empty,'" Wansink says.

Other experiments suggest that dish size influences how much we eat. In one test, 168 moviegoers who had just finished dinner were given fresh or stale popcorn from different-size containers. People ate 34% to 45% more popcorn if it was served in "extra-super-size ginormous buckets" than in regular large containers -- even if the popcorn was stale," Wansink says. In another test, he found that people pour about 37% more liquid in short, wide glasses than in tall, skinny ones of the same volume.

Even a kid's cereal bowl can be a trap, according to Wansink. Children poured about twice as much cereal into a 16-ounce bowl than into an 8-ounce bowl, he says.

In another experiment, 30 people were served soup out of a "bottomless bowl" that was pressure-fed under the table and slowly refilled from the bottom without them knowing. Another 30 people were served soup in regular bowls. The people with bottomless bowls ate 73% more than those with regular bowls, but they didn't rate themselves as any more full than those who ate less. "Don't rely on your stomach to tell you when you're full. It can lie," Wansink says.

The Solution: Mindful Eating

To combat mindless eating, get rid of things in your immediate environment that are biasing you toward eating too much, he says. His suggestions:

Since people eat more off of large plates, serve meals on salad plates rather than large dinner plates.

Keep the candy dish out of view and move healthier foods to eye level in the cupboard and refrigerator.

Eat in the kitchen or dining room, rather than in front of the TV, where you're likely to lose track of how much you've eaten, he says.

Jean Kristeller, PhD, professor of psychology at Indiana State University, says that while it's true that many of us are mindless eaters, we can train ourselves to better know when we're full.

She suggests starting with this simple mindful eating technique. "Pour yourself a 20-ounce glass of water, drink half, and concentrate on what it feels like in your stomach. Then drink the other half.

Reference: www.webmd.com



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