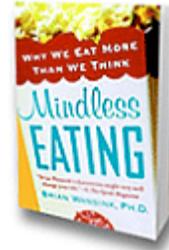


Mindful Strategies for Healthful Mindless Eating

The tips here were gathered from a book written by Brian Wansink, *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More than We Think* (Bantam Books: New York, NY, USA, 2006, 276 pages).

Brian Wansink is a professor of Marketing and Nutrition Sciences and the director of the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University. He has worked in many universities and research labs and in public policy with the USDA. His book is humorous and provides many details about research studies conducted over the past few decades by his own teams and those of others. For more information, visit his website THE MMethod, at www.mmethodeating.com



The “mindless margin”

People generally *think* they eat about 28% less than what they *actually* do. The “mindless margin” of eating amounts to about 100 to 200 calories a day.

Wansink believes that we don’t overeat because we are hungry or because our foods taste really good. Rather, we overeat because signals and cues around us tell us to eat. Research shows that we are unaware of this, and even deny it if it’s pointed out to us.

The average person makes more than 200 decisions about food every day, yet we cannot really explain most of them. With that many decisions happening each day, we can’t keep all of our food decisions in our conscious mind.

Each of us can make small changes so that our food environments help foster mindless better eating. To close this mindless margin, for example, we could begin by eating 10 calories a day too little, which would amount to a one-pound weight loss in a year. Eating 100 calories a day too little will amount to a 10-pound loss in a year. Walking one mile a day is about 100 calories expended, and equivalent to 10 pounds a year. We can go from mindless overeating to mindless better eating. Eating better is do-able.

Action steps to take to close the mindless margin

- Choose only three easy-for-you-to-do 100-calorie mindless changes to make every day for a month, using some of the personal food policies shown in the remaining sections, or some that you made up yourself.
- Use a checklist every day to track your progress. (Mindless margin daily checklists are available for each month of the year online at http://mindlesseating.org/free_stuff.php) If you do all three of your changes 100% for a year (but likely you won’t), you will lose 30 pounds. Get 32 checkmarks each month for a year and you’ll lose one pound.
- Choose to make one or more different changes after these positive habits have become mindless for you.
- Don’t lose more than 1/2 pound per week in order not to have your metabolism slow down.
- Wear “signal clothes.” Signal clothes are ones that are too snug if you’ve gained weight, but that fit well if you are at your desired weight. If you wear loose clothes all of the time, you don’t get the reminder signals from your clothes that you’re gradually gaining weight.

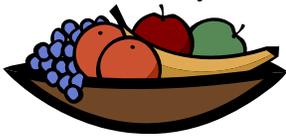


Examples of personal food policies to close the mindless margin: Beverages



- Drink 64 ounces of water a day so you're less likely to snack.
- Leave a pitcher of water sitting on the table so you will see it often and use it more.
- When drinking water, use a short wide glass or container.
- You burn about one calorie per ounce of an ice-cold beverage you drink. So if you drink eight 8-ounce glasses of ice water per day, you'd burn 70 calories.
- With beverage glasses, think slender if you want to be slender. If you don't fill your glass, you'll tend to pour 30% more into a wide glass than into a slender one.
- Alternate glasses of water with whatever else you are drinking.
- Estimate the calories in a drink using the 10, 20 rule: thin drinks (soft drinks, punch, juice, milk) are about 10 calories per ounce, while thick drinks (smoothies, meal replacer shakes) are about 20 calories per ounce.

Examples of personal food policies to close the mindless margin: Snacks



- At parties: Stay more than an arm's length from any snacks. Stop eating if you are talking to someone, so you don't eat while distracted. If possible, arrive late or leave early. Do not eat comfort foods at an office party; it is for business, not pleasure.
- Snack only at the table in the dining room, and place the food on a clean plate(s). Get a clean glass or plate if getting second helpings. This makes it less convenient to serve, eat and clean up after an impulse snack. The more hassle it is to eat, the less we eat.
- Instead of eating directly out of a package or box, put your snack in a separate dish and leave the box in the kitchen.
- Cover up, move, hide or otherwise stay away from nutrient-poor high-calorie foods that you like. If possible, don't even keep them around. Thinking of food can make you hungry.
- Eat a fruit and veggie with a glass of water before snacking on other foods.
- Show off and place nutrient-rich low-calorie foods in prominent places. Foods that are visible are eaten more often.
- Eat fruit or crunchy veggies for dessert or as a snack.
- Stock your home and office refrigerators with pop-top cans of tuna, yogurt or string cheese. Protein can take the edge off your snack attack appetite.
- Think of healthy snack substitutes and post your list in a visible place.
- Alter existing recipes or products in modest ways (10-20% of calories) to reduce their caloric density. Keep the volume the same. Don't label it "healthful" or reduced calorie.
- Let each family member have their own cupboard for the snacks they want, cupboards that are off-limits to others.
- Eat nutrient-poor high-calorie foods in smaller amounts. The first two bites are the best.
- Re-package nutrient-poor high-calorie foods so the small serving is in its own container, not served from a larger package just before you're eating it, and not next to many other similar small containers that can be conveniently reached for. Otherwise, the serving will include anything that is left that can still be easily eaten.
- Create "pause points" in your snack. These are points where you have to ask yourself if you really want to keep eating, by getting up to go get more or by opening another mini-package to get more.
- Chew gum or drink water if distracted, instead of eating food.

Examples of personal food policies to close the mindless margin: Snacks (continued)

- Don't eat while distracted. Multi-tasking while eating causes you to eat more due to the habit of eating when doing a certain task, forgetting how much we just had and extending how long we eat. Our stomachs can't count.
- Think 20 percent less, and dish out 20% less than you think you might want before you start to eat. In most studies, people can eat 20% less without noticing it. Exception: eat 20% more when it comes to eating fruits and vegetables.
- Eat until you are just 80% full – until you are no longer hungry and are “satisfied.”
- We become “full” based on factors such as: how big the food's volume is, how much we chew, how much we taste, how much we swallow, how much we think about the food we are eating, how long we have been eating, and the original serving size given.
- The more calories a snack has, the more people underestimate the number of calories it has. To help with this, estimate the calories in each item, and then add them up.
- Mini-size your boxes. The bigger the package you pour from, the more you will eat: 20 to 30% more for most foods. Repackage your jumbo box into small bags or containers.
- Eat lower-calories foods, but ones that have a big volume.
- Serve less variety, especially of high-calorie nutrient-poor foods. The more variety you have, the more food you will eat.
- Don't put more than two foods on your plate at any given time. Go back for more if you are still hungry.
- Serve small portions and go back for more if still hungry after 20-30 minutes.
- See it *before* you eat it. Put everything you want to eat on a plate or in a bowl *before* you start eating – even ice cream and chips.
- See it *while* you eat. Don't move away trash wrappers, bones, dirty glasses or plates, etc.
- Chew foods longer and eat more slowly.
- Be careful when eating foods are associated with being healthful, because we tend to eat more of these foods (such as a treat labeled as low-fat).
- Mini-size most of your serving platters and eating bowls and plates. Serve foods from smaller dishes onto smaller plates and bowls. Because people consume an average of 92% of what they serve themselves, larger dishes lead to larger food intake.
- Choose a smaller spoon. You will serve yourself less.
- Don't buy foods that you don't want to – or shouldn't – eat. You'll only be tempted by keeping these foods on hand.
- Eat comfort foods if you want to, but choose reasonably healthy ones. Comfort foods are foods that taste and look the way you think they should, which brings comforting thoughts and feelings to your mind. Past positive associations are the most common reasons that a food becomes a comfort food. People tend to eat indulgent “bad for you” foods when in a bad mood, and healthier foods when in a good mood. Top comfort foods for men are ice cream, soup and pizza or pasta, which make them feel pampered, spoiled, taken care of or waited on. Top comfort foods for women are ice cream, chocolate and cookies, foods not associated with preparation or cleanup.
- Pair healthier foods with positive events. Create more or healthier favorite comfort foods for yourself this way. (For example, pair chocolate with fruit, instead of chocolate with cake.) The goal is to change your eating habits, but not make you feel deprived.

