

How You May Be Sabotaging Your Weight

by Registered Dietitian

Weight Control Basics

Your weight is determined by the calories you take in and the calories you burn on a daily basis. If you're like most adults, you've been taking in more calories than you burn and you have excess body fat that you'd like to get rid of. If you're not like most adults, consider yourself warned as experts predict that 9 out of 10 people will become overweight or obese at some point in their lifetime. This underscores the importance of consistently balancing the calories you take in with the right amount of activity, especially since the majority of people pack on the pounds slowly and steadily without really noticing it. Years of misjudging your intake by just a few calories at a time will end up sabotaging your weight. For example, if you gain the average amount of one pound per year, this means you're off by only 10 calories a day. After 20 to 30 years, you'll end up 20 to 30 pounds overweight. To help you avoid this, here are common ways people underestimate the calories they take in and unknowingly eat more than they realize.



What you don't know WILL hurt you

Research shows that most people: 1) don't know how much to eat to control their weight; 2) don't accurately judge the calories they take in and 3) have no idea they take in extra calories in different situations.

In a recent national survey, only 15 percent accurately estimated how many calories they should eat to maintain their weight. Ask yourself – how many calories should I eat to maintain my weight? This begs the question – is it possible to maintain a healthy weight without knowing how many calories to eat? Certainly, if you keep regular tabs on your waistline and make the needed adjustments to your diet or activity level. Studies on college freshmen showed that daily weighing helped maintain body weight whereas those who did not weigh daily gained nearly seven pounds in ten weeks. Since most people don't weigh themselves daily or even monthly, they don't notice the weight creeping on. And as you can see, what you don't know WILL hurt you.

You eat more than you think you do

Let's say you do know how many calories to eat to manage your weight. The next question is - do you accurately judge how much food you eat? Not according to research. When people are asked to record how much they consume, they consistently underestimate. , , Overweight and obese women tend to underestimate more than other people, and it worsens as body mass index (BMI) goes up. , That is, the higher the BMI, the fewer calories people report eating. Meal size also affects how accurate we are. The larger the meal, the more we misjudge how much we eat. One study demonstrated that participants underestimated a large meal by up to 1,000 calories. If you ate an extra 1,000 calories once a week without making up for it with more activity, you'd gain almost 15 pounds in a year. An extra 1,000 calories equates to eating one more slice of meat lover's pizza and one more fruit smoothie. The bottom line is we eat more than we think we do, making weight control quite challenging.

You eat more and don't even realize it

Studies have also shown that people unknowingly consume more calories in the following situations:

- Food is presented in large quantities (restaurants, parties)
- A wide variety of food is present (buffets, all you can eat)
- More people are present
- Being distracted and doing something else (watching TV)
- Eating out of large packages (bag of chips, tub of ice cream)
- Tempting foods are within reach and within eyesight
- Frequently dining out

By becoming aware of how you eat in these situations, you'll be better equipped to control the amount of food you take in.

Get informed and take charge

One of the most effective ways to get informed about the way you eat is to track it regularly. People who do lose more weight. To avoid calorie amnesia, jot down everything you consume right away. Start to pay attention to the calorie content of the items you choose by reading food labels and looking up the calorie content of restaurant foods and beverages. Keep in mind that many beverages contain calories so be sure to count those tea drinks, sports drinks and alcohol. They add up quickly especially if you're thirsty. In certain states it is now required by law to post the calorie content directly on the menu board. You'll think twice once you realize your favorite coffee drink and muffin has 1,000 calories. If you're really motivated, weigh and measure the amount of food you eat with a food scale, measuring cups and measuring spoons and calculate the calories you take in. This pocket size Calorie, Fat and Carb Counter contains thousands of common foods, restaurant items and useful information. Since humans are creatures of habit, you'll get familiar with the items you eat regularly and measuring will no longer be necessary. The idea is to get educated on how much you eat.

To prevent unconsciously eating excess calories, follow these tips:

- Eat and only eat. Avoid being distracted during mealtimes or snack times.
- Eat from smaller plates, bowls and glasses.
- Portion out your food and avoid "family style" eating or eating out of the package.
- When you dine out, control the portion sizes by sharing meals or packaging some to take home right away.
- During social occasions, decide on what you're going to eat and stick to it. Otherwise you'll graze mindlessly.
- Limit your alcohol intake. Alcohol tends to stimulate appetite and reduce your awareness of what you're eating and how much.
- Keep snacks, treats and tempting foods out of reach.
- The old adage "knowledge is power" is true for weight control if you use it to make informed decisions.

It's not rocket science if you judge by RESULTS over time

It's challenging to manage something you aren't aware of and don't keep track of. Since only one third of the population acknowledges that calories are responsible for weight gain, it's no wonder there's an obesity epidemic. 21 (And by the way, it's no coincidence that one third of adults have a healthy body weight.) Knowing how much you consume is a key part of successful weight control, but even if you don't know – the scale will tell you. If the number on your scale increases over time, you're taking in more calories than you're burning – PERIOD. The solution is to burn off that extra fuel by moving more and eating fewer calories. If you don't measure your results by checking your weight regularly, you'll end up sabotaging your waistline and likely your health.

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