

# Food Cues

As you are learning to change your habits and make healthier nutrition choices, it is important to understand some basics about human nature. There are some factors that have a powerful effect on what, when and how much we eat.

Scientists who study how people learn call these factors “cues.” Cues can be positive or negative. Positive cues encourage healthy behaviors and negative cues have a negative effect on our behavior, and lead us to overeat or be inactive.

Food cues: factors that affect what, when and how much we eat.

The basic question here is: What makes us eat? Keep this question in mind as you learn more about food cues.



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Everybody has different food cues. Some cues lead to healthier choices than others. As you look through these common food cues, think about which ones might lead you to healthy food choices and which ones challenge your healthy eating habits.

Here are some examples of common food cues and their effects on us.

Here is a list of some common cues:

- Hunger
- What we are thinking or feeling
- What other people say and do
- Sight and smell of food
- Certain activities such as watching TV or seeing pictures of food in a magazine

Cue	Makes us want to eat
We see a carton of ice cream in the freezer	Ice cream
We turn on the tv	Potato chips
We go to the movies	Popcorn

Where we are physically can also have an impact on our food cues:

At Home	At Work
In the living room: TV, computer, telephone, candy dishes	On the way to work: traveling by a bakery or fast food restaurant
In the kitchen: ready-to-eat foods (ice cream, cheese, cookies), food being cooked, leftovers	In public areas: high-fat or high-calorie foods (doughnuts, high-fat coffee creamers, candy) in vending machines
In the dining room: full serving dishes on the table, large dinner plates, leftovers on plates	At desk: unhealthy snacks brought from home

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## Changing Food Cues and Habits

Food cues aren't always bad. But, they can be a problem if they get in the way of our efforts to eat healthier. Here are some ideas for dealing with negative food cues:

- Stay away from the cue or keep it out of sight.

Example: Keep the candy dish in a drawer rather than on a desk at work.

- Build a new, healthier habit.
  - Practice reacting to the cue in a healthier way.
  - Add a new cue that helps you lead a healthier life.
  - Remember, it takes time to break an old habit or build a new one.

Example: Keep healthy choices (e.g. fruit and vegetables, air-popped popcorn, calorie-free drinks, low-fat yogurt, fruit popsicles, etc.) easy to reach, in sight, and ready to eat.

List some of your favorite healthy, low-calorie food choices:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



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## Shopping Tips

Here are some tips to help you avoid food cues while shopping for food:

- Make a shopping list ahead of time. Stick to the list!
- Avoid shopping when you are hungry.
- Avoid sections in the store that you find tempting.
- Ask the grocery store manager to order healthier, less processed foods that you want.
- Find and use coupons or deals for healthier, less processed foods.
- Take advantage of grocery store delivery.
- Others:
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

## Candy and sweets:

- Do not bring them into the house.
- If you do bring them into your home, keep them out of sight.
- If you must have candy or sweets, buy a smaller size.



# Food Cues

## **High-fat and high-calorie foods in kitchen:**

- Stop stocking these foods altogether.
- Store them out of sight (in a drawer or cabinet).
- Make them hard to reach.
- Keep healthy, low-fat, low-calorie and/or nutrient dense foods easy to reach, in sight, and ready to eat.
- Limit high-fat and high-calorie foods to those that need to be cooked.

## **Foods you cook or eat as leftovers:**

- Make a rule not to eat while cooking.
- Ask someone else to taste the food.
- Put leftovers away before you eat your meals. (Ask someone else to put them away or freeze them right away for future meals).

## **Dinner table:**

- Put food on the plates in the kitchen.
- Do not have serving dishes on the dinner table.
- Use small plates or bowls.
- Serve small portions.
- Remove your plate from the table as soon as you are finished.
- Do not eat the food that your children or family members leave on their plates.

