

KEEPING IT OFF!

Lesson #2: Environment

Contents:

Environment and Cue Control

There are three environments that must be influenced in order for you to alter your lifestyle and thus your weight: social, physical and psychological environments. The first two will be discussed here and in the next few lessons. The third is discussed in later stages of the program.

1. Role of others

An important part of your behavior modification program is to actively work on changing the environmental influences that make it difficult for you to regulate your eating behavior. Something often overlooked as being out of your control is the effect that other people have on you. It is true that you cannot dictate other people's behaviors; however, you can educate them about what you are doing and try to enlist their help and support. Tell friends, family, and any other relevant people what you are planning to do. You cannot lose weight in the hope of "surprising" friends, family, and associates - the process is too demanding! As you lose weight and change your lifestyle, *people will notice anyway*. It is better to tell them initially and solicit their help and cooperation. You can **assertively** set an example for them and make your food decisions independently.

2. Food cues

A second element of your environment that you can adjust for your benefit is the influence of food-related cues bombarding you in your own home. Remove any and all food or food-cues from all parts of your house except the kitchen. Remove anything and everything from your kitchen that does not directly have to do with cooking or food. Do not allow yourself to be lured into the kitchen by the telephone; do not use the kitchen table as a desk. If you have more than one entrance to your house, get into the habit of always using an entrance that does not lead into the kitchen. Arrange your entire home and routine in such a way that you do not need to enter your kitchen unless it is mealtime. Make sure all foods (nuts, candies, etc.) are kept only in the kitchen and stored out of sight. Ask your family's cooperation in limiting food to the kitchen area. Everyone has willpower, but it never works 100% of the time. *Do not test yourself needlessly!* Keeping out of the kitchen is a logical precaution. The more time you spend in the kitchen, the higher the probability that you will miseat. The philosophy behind these changes is to help yourself by removing the stumbling blocks that have undermined your good intentions previously. You are establishing habits to follow for the rest of your life. Remember, avoidance of unnecessary food cues is one of the cornerstones of keeping weight off.

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3. Food storage

Rid your house of any tempting food items that you do not wish to eat at this time. In addition to keeping only the foods on your list in the house, get into the habit of keeping *your* foods in a special place in the freezer, refrigerator and pantry. Also, keep them wrapped in your own distinctive wrapping. In this way, other household members will not accidentally snack on foods you need for your menus, and at the same time, you have another way of protecting yourself from food cues. When preparing your meals, you will be able to quickly find the foods you need without having to sort through other foods. Be kind to yourself; try to control the situation as much as possible. For example, if *your* food is always located in plain view in the refrigerator, you will be less tempted by other foods than if you have to move the leftover pizza or chocolate milk while you are searching for *your* chicken. The same system works well for foods kept in the freezer and pantry.

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Homework

We'd like you to start working on your *Hunger Sensations* log. The purpose of this is to show you that hunger comes and goes whether or not you choose to eat.

Arbitrarily select six times during the coming week when you feel physically hungry (however *you* define physical hunger). Record the **day of the week and the time of day** in one of the blocks (numbered 1-6) on the left hand side of the chart. Now describe the **intensity of the hunger sensation** by marking the appropriate box. Next, describe briefly your **actions** in response to this hunger sensation.

Hunger is **not** a constant sensation; it will eventually subside. Note the approximate time when you realized that you were no longer hungry and calculate the total time the hunger sensation lasted from beginning to end.

In most cases, you probably will not notice precisely when the hunger feeling goes away, but at some point you will realize that you have not been bothered by hunger feelings for a while.

The next time you are hungry, repeat this procedure. Finish filling out the sheet until you have at least three examples of times you felt hungry and did not eat. Then determine the amount of time it took for the hunger to subside in each case. Compare the time periods for the examples in which you have eaten something, and for the examples in which you have not. Are the time spans different? *The time spans are often similar whether one*

eats in response to the hunger sensation or not.

The explanation of this is that hunger is actually perceived in your brain. When you eat something, it takes about 20 minutes for the chemical process to occur which causes your brain to register that you have eaten. On the other hand, when your brain is receiving a signal to eat, and you decide not to answer it (not to eat), after about 20 minutes your brain chooses not to pay attention to that signal any more because it is a distraction. This is not a conscious decision on your part; it all takes place on a physiological level. This process is termed *habituation*.

Keep the *Hunger Sensation* records to prove to yourself that these principles do indeed work for you. This knowledge will be an invaluable tool in the future; you will find it possible to wait out hunger feelings when it is not time for you to eat and pass up second helpings when you have eaten too quickly.

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WEEK TWO CHECKLIST

- I have told friends, family, and all relevant people that I am adhering to a complete and specific diet program.
- I have rearranged my kitchen to comply with the following behavioral suggestions:
 - a) *I have moved my telephone out of the kitchen.*
 - b) *I have relocated my personal papers and work areas that might have been in the kitchen.*
 - c) *I no longer enter and leave my house through the kitchen entrance.*
- I have at least one week's food supply on hand. It is wrapped in my own distinctive wrapping, and it is in my own special place in the freezer, refrigerator, or pantry.
- I have kept busy and have avoided food.
- I have kept an accurate diary of all food eaten, exercise, daily water intake, etc.

Explanations and/or comments for categories not checked:

