

Prevent Unplanned Eating

Some people don't struggle much when they're deciding when and what to eat. They just open the cupboard or fridge and select what they want. If you're like most clients though, you've struggled at times when you were tempted to eat something you shouldn't. You probably had a dialogue in your mind that went something like this:

"I really want to eat this. But I know I shouldn't. But I really want it. I'm not supposed to have it. But I feel like having it! I know it's not on my food plan, but I don't care. I'm going to have it anyway".

Internal arguments can create tension, which is emotionally and physically uncomfortable. You'll be tempted to relieve this tension by eating. Once you make the decision to eat, you may find that your discomfort immediately subsides – even *before* you reach for the food. You can do other things though, to reduce your discomfort.

Just as deciding to eat can reduce tension, so can deciding not to eat.

Your written food plan will help you make your decision ahead of time – before you're confronted with uncomfortable cravings and tension. But it won't eliminate indecision. There will be times when you begin to argue with yourself. Perhaps you're at a party and want a glass of wine that's not on your plan. Perhaps someone asks you to try something they have baked. The triggers for eating are endless, but the solution is straightforward: ***Tell yourself that you don't have a choice. You made a plan, and you'll follow that plan – no if's, ands or buts.***

Firmly saying **NO CHOICE** decreases both the struggle and the discomfort. Think about rules you already have in your life. Do you struggle over whether or not to brush your teeth? Imagine how annoying it would be if you had to fight to get yourself to do this mundane task every day! But you don't struggle because you have a rule. I have to brush every day.

Here are some of my “no choice” rules that I have made for myself and I don't struggle with:

- I eat a substantial amount of protein, vegetables and fruit at every meal.
- I only drink alcohol on Fridays and Saturdays.
- I eat only eat raw vegetables while preparing dinner.
- When eating out, I only eat up to 25% more than I usually eat at home.

These rules ensure I stay in control at special occasions and keep me from gaining more than a couple of pounds when I'm on holidays. Following rules eliminates the struggle over what to eat or not to eat.

Make a “NO CHOICE” Response Card

Think about some eating rules that you'd like to establish and write them on an index card. One rule that should be on your list is that you have to commit to following your food plan.

To strengthen this idea, make a Response Card that reads “NO CHOICE” and read this twice a day or whenever you are struggling over whether or not to eat something.



“NO CHOICE”

What are you thinking?

Sabotaging Thought: I deserve to be able to eat what I want

Helpful Response: If I want all the benefits of being slimmer, I just can't eat whenever I want without planning. I have to make “I deserve to be slimmer and feel good about myself” a much higher priority than “I deserve to make spontaneous choices about what I eat”

Sabotaging Thought: I don't think that I can accept the fact that I can't eat spontaneously

Helpful Response: I've been giving myself choices about what, when and how much to eat for a long time, so it feels natural and right to do so. On the other hand, I have to face the fact that spontaneous eating doesn't work for me. The more often I say, NO CHOICE, to myself, the less I'll struggle.

End Overeating

Even if you're not tempted to overeat today, you'll undoubtedly face trigger situations many times in the future.

There are two circumstances you might face while dieting that qualifies as overeating:

If you eat any food in a greater quantity than you had planned: Maybe you had written down last night that you were going to eat 6 ounces of chicken but instead you ate 10 ounces. Or maybe you had planned to eat 1 cup of vegetables, but since your diet plan allows more, you ended up eating 2 cups.

If you feel full partway through your meal but continue to finish it anyway, leading to a feeling of over fullness.

In order for you to successfully lose weight and keep it off, you must know how to identify when you're not longer hungry so that you can stop eating.

Overload Your Plate – and Don't Eat It All

Today, you'll practice not overeating by purposely putting more food on your plate than you plan to eat. Pick one meal, preferably lunch or dinner. Choose a food that's on your plan, but then I want you to purposely give yourself a larger portion than you would normally allow. Also, choose a food that you're not supposed to eat and put it on your plate. At the beginning of the meal, push the extra portions to the side of your plate. Then eat only the food on your plan.

What you should tell yourself:

If you're tempted to eat the extra food, use some of the anti-craving techniques. If you find that you still want to eat what's left on your plate, counter your sabotaging thoughts. For example, if you think, *"It's a shame that I can't eat this ... It's bad to waste food"*, then tell yourself *"Isn't it great that I'm not eating this ... This is getting me closer to my goal of losing weight This is helping me to strengthen my resistance muscle"*.

Also remind yourself just how good you'll feel if you don't overeat versus how bad you'll feel if you do. Look back and reflect on the consequences of overeating in the past. *Are you glad that you overate then, given that it contributed to your current weight? Or are you sorry? Is the ratio of being sorry to glad now about 20,000 to 1? Ask yourself "how glad will I be in 10 minutes if I overeat now?"*

When you've finished eating just the food you're supposed to eat, clear your plate. Throw out the extra food or save it for another meal. If it was easy to do this task, you might never need to repeat it. On the other hand, if you found it difficult to resist eating the extra food, don't despair. Give yourself credit for trying and see what you can learn from the experience. Then repeat this exercise until it gets easy.

For the rest of your life, expect to encounter many situations in which you don't have control over the food you're served (at events, restaurants and friends/family houses) when you'll benefit from this kind of practice. You may find it especially helpful to try this exercise again the day before you know you'll be entering a situation in which you'll be tempted to overeat.

What are you thinking?

Sabotaging Thought: I don't need to do this. I'll be able to stop eating without practicing this skill

Helpful Response: This isn't a big deal. I should try it anyway. The worst thing that could happen is that I didn't need to do it. I might not learn from this, but I also might learn a lot.

Sabotaging Thought: I hate to deliberately waste food

Helpful Response: The truth is the extra food will either go to waste in my body or go to waste in the bin. Either way, it'll go to waste. And no matter what I heard from my parents when I was growing up, overeating doesn't help starving people any place in the world.

Change Your Definition of Full

Ideally, you would eat only when you're hungry and stop eating when you're almost full or mildly full. Chances are, however, that you're not naturally good at this skill. Most clients didn't know how to recognize when they were really hungry and when they weren't. When they relied on hunger signals to guide their eating, they invariably overeat.

Here's a way to determine if you've overeaten:

Think about how easy it would be to take a walk at a moderate to brisk pace before you eat. You should be able to walk at the same pace just as easily after a meal, too. If you can't easily take a moderate to brisk walk after a meal, it means that you've eaten too much and you might have an unrealistic definition of fullness.

People without a weight problem feel somewhat uncomfortable when they eat to the point where they can't comfortably take a walk after a meal. But when you eat to that point, you might not feel the same discomfort. The sensations you notice might feel normal to you. Your definition of fullness might be part of the reason you gained weight in the first place or have had difficulty losing weight.

You might eat beyond the point of normal fullness for several other reasons too:

- You might want to prolong the eating experience – that is, have food in your mouth for a longer period of time
- You might have difficulty turning your attention away from eating if you know there's food readily available
- You might be concerned that if you don't load up now, you'll be too hungry before you can have your next meal or snack
- You might link the sensation of over fullness with feeling safe or protected from discomfort, in other words you eat more now to avoid feeling hungry later

Break The Connection

In order to lose excess weight and keep it off, you must break the connection between over fullness and normal fullness. To do so you'll need lots of experience of eating to normal fullness and saying to yourself *"This is great that I'm stopping now"*. You'll then begin to associate over fullness with feeling abnormal.

Once you change the connection, you'll struggle so much less and feel so much less deprived. Do the following:

1. For a month, after each meal, ask yourself *"Could I easily go for a moderate to brisk walk?"* If you're not sure whether or not you can, try it.

If the answer is yes, tell yourself *"Good, then I'm experiencing normal fullness"*.

If the answer is no, tell yourself *"This is what over fullness feels like ...It's not normal ...At my next meal; I'm going to make sure I don't put too much food on my plate"*.
2. Every time you'd like to overeat but don't, give yourself credit. You might say, for example *"it's great that I'm exercising my resistance muscle"*.
3. If you're triggered to overeat, remove the triggers. For example, if there are serving dishes on the table, move them away from you so that they are out of your reach. If someone serves you too much food, move the extra amounts to the side of your plate. Get someone else to put away leftovers, as well as clear and scrape the dishes.
4. Respond to your sabotaging thoughts. When you've finished what you planned to eat, you might think *"Oh, I really want to eat more"*. If so, tell yourself *"No, I'm normally full ... I want to be slimmer, so I'm going to stop eating now"*.
5. If you feel anxious, remind yourself that hunger is not an emergency. Remember, you can tolerate the feeling – you proved this to yourself already. Hunger will come and go, and you certainly can wait to eat until your next scheduled snack or meal – there's always another coming.

TIP:

If you finish what's on your plate and feel disappointed that you can't eat more, remind yourself that you'll be able to eat again soon. You might say,

“it's okay, I'm going to have a snack in three hours.... I can wait.”

Then immediately read your Advantages Response Card to remind yourself why it's worth putting up with this momentary disappointment.

What are you thinking?

Are you feeling resistant about recognizing that you have to eat less? Then read the following sabotaging thoughts and create **Response Cards** based on them:

Sabotaging Thought: I like feeling really, really full.

Helpful Response: I need to accept that this sensation is not what is considered normal. I'm really eating beyond fullness, which has contributed to my weight gain.

Sabotaging Thought: What if I end up feeling hungry before it's time to eat again?

Helpful Response: I have just learned that hunger is not an emergency, I can tolerate the sensations of hunger and that, if I don't focus on it, the hunger will dissipate. If I still don't feel confident in my abilities to tolerate hunger, I should repeat the exercise of “Tolerating Hunger” I learned earlier in the programme.