

Don't Let Social Situation Derail Diet  
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Social eating is a good opportunity to interact with friends and family. Social eating is also among the top reasons people cite for dining in restaurants, according to surveys. Yet studies show that eating with others tends to make us eat more. Combine social eating and the super-sized portions dished out in restaurants, and the temptation to overeat is a strong force in our lives.

Chances are good that other people are unknowingly swaying your eating habits, and you are knowingly or unknowingly letting it happen. When we drop by to see friends, we are offered food or drink almost as quickly as we are offered a seat. This made sense decades ago when people traveled long distances to visit one another. Today it is more of a habit and less of a necessity.

We face similar diet traps at work, school and even at home. Co-workers like to treat others with donuts and cookies. Parents, grandparents and teachers often reward children with sweets. At home, you might mindlessly dig into a bag of cookies left on the kitchen counter. Occasionally giving in to these “temptations” may not harm a healthy diet, but when it happens too often, your efforts to eat healthfully become derailed. By recognizing these influences, you can formulate a plan to satisfy your hunger and taste and still eat a balanced diet. An action plan for eating wisely when eating with others includes:

- Eat small portions of the selections that are really important to you and larger portions of low-calories foods.
- When buying or making food for others, choose something that they will like but that you don't find tempting.
- Banish all treats from view. Keep them in the freezer or out of sight in cabinets.
- Talk to your co-workers. Chances are good that they don't want a lot of caloric food around either.
- Researchers tell us that when we dine with others, we often lose track of how much we are eating. Even when we think we have finished our meal, if we are still at the table and there is still food in front of us, it is easy to ignore another bite or sip. .
- Restaurant portions are also problematic because they have ballooned dramatically over the last few decades. The average muffin swelled from 1.5 ounces and 210 calories in 1986 to 4 ounces and 500 calories in 2006. Sandwiches, pasta dishes, Chinese food, desserts and more have also expanded. We have come to expect this new norm, and the portion we eat is influenced by the amount in front of us. In America, I hope in the near future we will be looking more at the presentation of the food instead of the quantity.
- When you determine the portion size is larger than you should consume, ask for a carry out box **before** you begin your meal. Package the food immediately and it will be so much easier not to overeat.
- Be the first to order, so you are not influenced by others.
- Pace yourself with the slowest eater at the table. Try to be the last person to start and finish eating.

- If you are eating at a buffet, look over everything that's offered before you fill your plate. Choose only the foods that you really want.
- Splurge carefully. Don't waste your calories on something that is not delicious.

Eating healthfully when surrounded by food is hard, but not impossible. Assess your obstacles and consider all possible solutions. Then pick and carry out the best strategies. Obtain nutrition information from credible sources. Call your County's Family and Consumer Sciences Agent for assistance. Consult our UF/IFAS Website <http://www.edis.ufl.edu> for publications. Many of the ideas shared in this article are from a UF/IFAS program entitled Toward Permanent Weight Management written by Specialist Dr. Linda Bobroff.

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