

IFAS Extension

Unplug Before You Enjoy a Meal

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Mindless Eating

According to a report produced by The Nelson Company, the average American watches approximately 153 hours of television (TV) every month at home. In addition, it is estimated that 131 million Americans watch on average about 3 hours of video online each month at home and work. This means that a person who watches both TV at home and online videos would be estimated at spending 6.5 days a month or 78 days a year watching television.

Despite these disturbing statistics, research has shown that besides contributing to Americans' sedentary lifestyle TV viewing may actually cause Americans to eat more. According to a study of 78 undergraduate students performed at Georgia State University, "television viewing is associated with an increase in meal frequency." A meal was identified as anytime an individual consumed 50 calories or more separated by at least 15 minutes. The study found that while watching TV when eating decreased portion size participants ate almost one additional meal a day. This leads to the suggestion that your body's internal queues may not operate the same when watching television. Other studies have replicated this experiment with individuals of different age groups and still produced similar results.

A great way for families to disengage from the TV at meal time is to talk to one another. Jodiemae Lyttle and Dr. Eboni Baugh of the University of Florida had the following suggestions for family conversation starters:

- Discuss one another's day. Ask questions that express your interest in your family members' daily life.
- Discuss current events. Bring up news appropriate for all family members.
- Pick and choose. Create topics together; write them on a piece of paper and randomly choose one to discuss each night.

The benefit of family dinners and family conversations is more than just a matter of weight management. Children and teens that eat dinner and engage in family conversations are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. These youth are also more likely to do well in school, have healthier eating habits, and positive peer relationships.

No family to talk with at dinner? What's a single guy or gal to do? Singles can focus on controlling portion sizes. Cassie Gaisse and Dr. Karla Shelnett of the University of Florida have some great portion suggestions for singles.

- If you are hungry before a meal then eat, but eat healthy.
- Try starting meals with a small tossed salad.
- When eating out place half of your meal in a to-go container right away.
- Don't snack out of the package especially when you are distracted by TV or reading.

Whether you are single or have a family take control of your plate! Do not let TV or internet video watching distract you while eating. For more tips like the ones you read about in this article contact your local county extension office (<http://solutionsforyourlife.com/map/>).

Have a question? Contact the University of Florida IFAS - Jefferson County Extension office at 342-0187, weekdays 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m.

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