

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Troy H. Peters

Out of Sight, Out of Mind for Eating Healthy

It's 10 p.m. You're sitting on the couch watching TV. The never-ending stream of commercials hawking fast-food joints and junk food has your mouth watering and your stomach rumbling. Your eyes wander to the kitchen and the bag of potato chips on the counter. You know you should resist, but before you know it, half the bag is gone.

Sound familiar? Do you struggle to avoid candy and junk food? Are you constantly tempted by unhealthy snacks? Rather than berate your willpower, consider what scientists have discovered: Accessibility, proximity and visibility may play the most influential role in food choice.



Out of Sight, Out of Mouth

Dr. Peters teaches patients that a healthful diet is a key component of the *chiropractic lifestyle* — a way of life that focuses on warding off the chemical, physical and emotional causes of spinal problems and related disease. A poor diet is considered a chemical instigator of stress. That's why Dr. Peters shares research about the "out of sight, out of mind" theory with patients.

Dr. Peters wants you to know that a variety of environmental factors influence food intake. Mood, portion size, even weather conditions, all affect appetite. But now new research shows that "out of sight, out of mind" may work wonders when it comes to sticking to a nutritious diet.

For instance, in one experiment testing this theory, researchers measured candy intake using four different variables. They placed 30 chocolate Hershey Kisses® in either clear or opaque candy jars on 40 test subjects' desks or

six feet away from their desks.

Every Monday during the four-week study, the researchers changed either the jar's placement or switched its color. At night, the investigators counted how many candies were consumed and refilled the jars. The result? Individuals ate almost twice as many Kisses® in clear containers on their desks than when they were in opaque containers — and the fewest from opaque containers six feet away.

Specifically, each day, participants ate an average of 7.7 Kisses® from clear jars on their desks, 4.6 from opaque desk containers, 5.6 from clear jars six feet away and 3.1 from opaque jars six feet away (*Int J Obes* 2006;30:871-5).

More Effort, More Guilt

Ironically, in follow-up questionnaires, all study participants consistently reported eating more chocolate from the jars farther away than those on their desks (the exact opposite of what actually occurred).

The study's authors explain that subjects were more apt to overestimate consumption of candy farther away due to the effort that was required to obtain it. The study participants were more apt to recall consuming the candy when they had to stand up, walk

over and select a piece. When the candy was close by, subjects were more apt to lose track of what they had eaten.

The authors summarize that "the proximity and visibility of a food can consistently increase an adult's consumption of it. Knowing about these deviation tendencies is important for those attempting to effectively monitor their consumption of fat and sugar." (*Int J Obes* 2006;30:871-5.)

Terminating Temptation

Of course, Dr. Peters wants you to know that this study has broader implications than just moving your cookie jar from the counter to the cupboard! The key is that, in general, we tend to eat what's nearby and accessible.



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Making a few simple changes based on this knowledge may have a dramatic impact on your diet. Following are tips to help you reduce the temptation factor for unhealthy snacks and increase consumption of nutritious ones:

Consider Convenience

Does this scenario sound familiar? Fruits and veggies in your refrigerator crisper are ignored, only to slowly rot. In contrast, unhealthy treats stored in high-traffic cabinets disappear with lightening speed. In addition to visibility and proximity, accessibility also plays an enormous role in food choice.

When researchers from the University of Sydney, Australia, surveyed students, they determined that convenience is one of the biggest barriers to healthy eating. The study consisted of 213 children, aged 7 to 17, from 34 different schools. Students were most apt to choose foods that were convenient, which often meant less than nutritious choices (*J Am Diet Assoc* 2003;103:497-501).



Fight Temptation With Food Prep

Upon returning home from the grocery store, prepare veggies so that they're ready to cook or consume. Place washed and diced portion-sized amounts in small Ziploc® or Tupperware® containers so they're a snap to eat on the spot or take anywhere.

Do the same with fruit. For variety, prepare a large bowl of fruit salad then divide it into serving-sized portions. Prevent sliced apples from browning with a slight spritz of lemon juice. If you're craving sweets, add a tablespoon of honey or a dab of frozen concentrated orange juice to your fruit.

Decorate Deliciously

Fruit is less expensive than flowers. And, having a well-stocked fruit bowl as your centerpiece entices the entire family to grab a healthy snack.

Be a Vocal Veggie Advocate

In addition to having nutritious, ready-to-eat snacks visible, talk about their importance with family members. Unhealthy snacks have an unfair advantage in the out-of-mind game: We're reminded of them everywhere, every day, from TV and print ads to grocery-store checkout counters. Combat this by becoming a fruit and veggie advocate.

Keep Cookies Behind Closed Doors

The best strategy for avoiding junk food is to not have it available. That means not purchasing it in the first place or stocking it in your cabinets. Plan your shopping list ahead of time, and don't shop while hungry.

If you must purchase junk foods, opt for the smallest-size bags or containers.

When you arrive home, refer to the portion size listed on the item's label and divide single servings accordingly into plastic bags or containers. This will allow you to track how much you eat.

Once that's done, place all treat containers in out-of-sight and difficult-to-reach areas, such as an upper cabinet, which requires a step ladder to access.

Pay Attention to Portion Size

If you feel you must have just a few high-sugar or high-fat treats around, keep only small portion sizes accessible. Why? When it comes to portion size, your eyes are more in control than your stomach.

Research shows that visual cues of portion size influence intake. Translation: You'll feel just as full with a smaller portion size treat as a larger serving. For example, in one study, 54 participants, aged 18 to 46, consumed soup from either standard bowls or bowls that imperceptibly refilled as the contents were consumed.

Individuals who ate from self-refilling bowls consumed almost twice as much soup (14.7 oz. vs. 8.5 oz.) than those eating from normal soup bowls. However, despite consuming 73 percent more, they didn't believe they had consumed more or perceive themselves as more sated than those eating from normal bowls.

"It seems that people use their eyes to count calories and not their stomachs. The importance of having salient, accurate visual cues can play an important role in the prevention of unintentional overeating." (*Obes Res* 2005;13:93-100.)



Psychology of Eating

Sticking to a healthy diet isn't easy. Temptations are everywhere. Knowing how psychology affects food choice and consumption is fundamental to maintaining a nutritious diet. This chiropractic office is dedicated to helping you prevent disease naturally, and the foundation for preventative care rests on proper nutrition. Let us be your guide in your quest for healthy eating and optimal health.

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