



# Mindless Eating

**TABLE 1** Altering one's personal environment to help reduce consumption

How environmental factors influence consumption	How one's personal environment can be altered to help reduce consumption
<b>The eating environment</b>	
Eating atmospherics: Atmospherics influence eating duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before completing a meal, have the breadbasket removed or have an entrée portion wrapped up "to go." The atmosphere of a long and relaxing dinner can then be enjoyed without the temptation to overeat.</li> <li>• Although soft music and candlelight can improve one's enjoyment of a meal, they have calorie intake consequences. Instead of lingering and eating a dessert, enjoy a cup of coffee in the pleasant atmosphere.</li> </ul>
Eating effort: Increased effort decreases consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Store tempting foods in less-convenient locations (such as in a basement or in a top cupboard).</li> <li>• Do not leave serving bowls and platters on the dinner table. Keep second servings a safe distance away.</li> </ul>
Eating with others: Socializing influences meal duration and consumption norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide how much to eat prior to the meal instead of during it. Order smaller quantities (e.g., half-size portions) to avoid "keeping pace" during the meal.</li> <li>• Model the behavior of a person who appears to be eating the least or the slowest.</li> </ul>
Eating distractions: Distractions can initiate, obscure, and extend consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discourage "grazing" by focusing only on food. Try to eat only when sitting down, and do this at a distraction-free table.</li> <li>• Before eating a distracting meal or snack (such as eating while watching television or reading the newspaper), pre-serve the portions and allow no "refills."</li> </ul>
<b>The food environment (the Five S's)</b>	
Salience of food: Salient food promotes salient hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminate the cookie jar, or replace it with a fruit bowl.</li> <li>• Wrap tempting foods in foil to make them less visible and more forgettable.</li> <li>• Place healthier, low-density foods in the front of the refrigerator and the less healthy foods in the back.</li> </ul>
Structure and variety of food assortments: Structure and perceived variety drives consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid multiple bowls of the same food (such as at parties or receptions) because they increase perceptions of variety and stimulate consumption.</li> <li>• At buffets and receptions avoid having more than two different foods on the plate at the same time.</li> <li>• To discourage others from over-consuming in a high-variety environment (such as at a reception or dinner party), arrange foods into organized patterns. Conversely, arrange foods in less-organized patterns to help stimulate consumption in the cafeteria of retirement homes and hospitals.</li> </ul>

Size of food packages and portions: The size of packages and portions consumption norms

Stockpiling of food: Stockpiled food is quickly consumed

Serving containers: Serving containers that are wide or large create consumption illusions

- Repackage foods into smaller containers to suggest smaller consumption norms.
- Plate smaller dinner portions in advance.
- Never eat from a package. Always transfer food to a plate or bowl in order to make portion estimation easier.
- Out of sight is out of mind. Reduce the visibility of stockpiled foods by moving them to the basement or to a cupboard immediately after they are purchased.
- Reduce the convenience of stockpiled foods by boxing them up or freezing them.
- Stockpile healthy, low-energy-density foods to stimulate their consumption and to leave less room for their high-density counterparts.
- Replace short wide glasses with tall narrow ones.
- Reduce serving sizes and consumption by using smaller bowls and plates.
- Use smaller spoons rather than larger ones when serving oneself or when eating from a bowl.

## Mindless Eating

Wansink, Brian (2004), "Environmental Factors that Increase Food Intake and Consumption Volume of Unknowing Consumers," *Annual Review of Nutrition*. Volume 24, 455-479 Retrieved on February 8, 2007 from: [http://mindlesseating.org/pdf/EnvironCues-ARN\\_2004.pdf](http://mindlesseating.org/pdf/EnvironCues-ARN_2004.pdf)

Consumption is a context where understanding fundamental behavior has immediate implications for consumer welfare. People are often surprised at how much they consume, and this indicates their consumption may be influenced at a basic level of which they are not aware or do not monitor. This is why simply knowing these environmental traps exist does not typically help in avoiding them. Relying only on cognitive control and on willpower often yields disappointing results. Furthermore, consistently reminding individuals to vigilantly monitor their actions around food is not realistic. At best, continued cognitive oversight is difficult for people who are focused, disciplined, and concentrated; it is impossible for those who are not. Package size, plate shape, lighting, socializing, and variety are only a few of the environmental factors that can influence the consumption volume of food far more than most people realize. Although such environmental factors appear unrelated, they generally influence consumption volume by inhibiting consumption monitoring and by suggesting alternative consumption norms. For researchers, this review suggests that redirecting the focus of investigations to the psychological mechanisms behind consumption will raise the profile and impact of research. For health professionals, this review underscores how small structural changes in personal e