

Dealing with Triggers

Triggers are everywhere – they’re on your television, they’re the smell of freshly baked pastries on your way to school, they’re at your friend’s birthday party and they’re at the movies. Triggers present a challenge when trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle because they send your body cues to eat – they tell your salivary glands to release saliva in preparation for food intake & notify your stomach to secrete more acid in anticipation of digestion.

5 Categories of Food Triggers:

- **Sensory Triggers:** Sensory triggers are those that you respond to on the basis of sight and smell. For example, walking past the cafeteria at school in the morning and smelling freshly baked cinnamon rolls or seeing a commercial for Breyer’s ice cream as you watch your favorite TV show in the evening. When one of your friends mentions going to KFC after football practice, you are being exposed to a sensory trigger. The mention of certain foods, such as fast food or dessert, can trigger your hunger.
- **Special Events Triggers:** Many events we attend have a tendency to focus around food. Birthday parties focus on birthday cake along with ice cream and many other treats such as candy and pizza. Vacations are an invitation to overeat – so many people develop a healthy lifestyle prior to vacation and then just ‘let go’ once they reach their destination by engaging in huge portions, high fat foods, and numerous desserts. The holiday season, beginning with Halloween and ending with New Years, revolves around goodies like candy, cookies, cakes and pies. Parties during the holiday season beg you to overeat and indulge in unhealthy choices. Even during the summer, with baseball games and cookouts, people overeat on potato salads, hamburgers and chips.
- **Activity Triggers:** Activity triggers are those that associate eating with certain activities. Going to the movies is not complete without a large popcorn smothered in butter, paired with a monstrous pop, and topped off with Goobers. Eating a stadium hot dog is a must when attending a sporting event. Bringing candy and goodies in the car on road trips while stopping at fast-food restaurants along the way. Eating a snack before bedtime because you always have a bedtime snack before hitting the sack. These are all examples of triggers that occur because of specific activities we engage in.
- **People Triggers:** People triggers occur when social gatherings are planned around food and prompt you to eat. Your friends want to get together to hang out on a Friday night & they choose to meet at Applebee’s to grab some dinner before heading to the football game. You need a break away from your Biology homework so you get together for a milkshake with your best friend at



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the nearby Steak & Shake. These are all examples of triggers caused by the affiliation of social gatherings with food.

- **Emotional Triggers:** Emotional triggers are brought on from specific emotions such as depression or loneliness. You get into an argument with your best friend so you decide to order a pizza to get your mind off of the fight. You have to stay at home Friday night because you have to watch the dog while your parents are out of town & all your friends are at the game – you're lonely and upset so you decide to munch on Peanut M&M's and Ruffles. You're stressed about your 9:00 Algebra exam so you stay up the night before cramming – cramming both your mind with numbers & your mouth with ice cream & cookies.

Healthy Triggers?

Yes there are such things as healthy triggers. Healthy triggers are those that can help you trigger healthy choices. Commercials promoting the 5-A-Day campaign for fruits & vegetables can raise your awareness of the importance of fruits & veggies. Exercising can also be a healthy trigger as many people are more apt to live a healthy lifestyle when they incorporate physical activity into their daily routines. Having a positive attitude & confidence can also be a healthy trigger. You will be less likely to binge on unhealthy foods if you are confident in your ability to succeed with a healthier lifestyle.

How do I overcome food triggers?

Food triggers can be overcome – they are not a sense of defeat or a reason to quit living a healthy lifestyle. Here are some healthy tips:

- **Avoid commercials.** Since so many food triggers come from advertisements during commercials, limit the amount of time you spend in front of the TV. During commercials, do some light exercises such as sit-ups or jogging in place or call a friend & chat for a few minutes.
- **Eat well-balanced meals throughout the day.** Do not deprive yourself of food throughout the day. Not eating enough food or calories during breakfast or lunch could lead to overeating in the evening. Make sure to have appropriate snacks, such as a handful of almonds or an apple with peanut butter, throughout the day to hold you over in between meals.
- **Maintain a healthy environment.** Have your house stocked with healthy snacks such as pretzels, low-fat yogurt, fresh fruit, peanut butter, veggies with low-fat dip, and granola bars. This way, if the problem foods are not present, you will be less likely to overeat on healthy snacks such as fruit.



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- **Eat before special events & activities.** Before going to birthday parties or holiday parties, be sure to eat a well-balanced meal prior to the party – this will help prevent overeating once you arrive at the party. The same could be true for activities such as ball games or the movies. If you are already full from a healthy dinner, you will be less likely to want to indulge in popcorn or hot dogs.
- **Don't deprive yourself!** Be sure to not completely eliminate your goodies. Having your one chocolate chip cookie when you have a craving is okay. You have a smaller chance of overeating your favorite goodies if you allow yourself a treat in moderation. Completely depriving yourself of goodies will lead to binging once you allow yourself to finally dig in.



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