

What makes us eat more?

Why do people overeat? Often it is for reasons not related to actual hunger. Your body may tell you it is hungry when it does not actually need food, or you may continue to eat after your appetite is satisfied. This makes it very easy to overeat. Cues or signals to eating have been the subject of some interesting research. Here are some ways to use this research to help you control overeating.

Time of day -- Our work and home routines train our bodies to feel hungry at the specific times of the day when we usually eat. This can lead to overeating if we add a meal or snack between our usual meals, or if one meal is especially large or eaten later than usual. If this happens to you, try having a very light meal at the regular time, such as half a turkey sandwich on whole wheat bread. Skipping meals is not recommended.

Variety – If more choices are available, we tend to eat a good deal more than if there are fewer choices. Given bowls with ten colors of M&Ms in them, people ate on average 43 more M&Ms than people whose bowls had only seven colors. This tendency might affect you when you have a lot of food choices, like choosing food from

a buffet or right after grocery shopping, so have a plan. At a buffet or party, look over all of the choices available first, before you put anything on your plate. Then, select two to four items you really want to try, and take only a very small portion of each. At home, try to increase the variety of healthy foods available and reduce the number of choices of sugary or high fat foods.

Air temperature – We tend to be less hungry on hot days and hungrier on chilly and cold ones. In cooler temperatures, we eat more calories to keep our bodies warm and our digestion speeds up, so we feel hungry sooner. People who run restaurants know this fact about our biology and often keep their thermostats low and the temperature cooler to entice you to eat more! Plan ahead and bring a sweater or jacket for the cooler temperature of the restaurant, no matter what the season.

References: The Science of Appetite, Time Magazine June 11, 2007. Mindless Eating by Brian Wansink, PhD. Bantam Books, 2006.

Recipe of the Week: White Bean Chili serves 8

Adapted from one of the 27 chili recipes at www.meatlessmonday.com

1 medium onion, chopped
1 teaspoon garlic, minced or crushed
2 (15-ounce) cans white beans (great northern, navy or cannellini beans)
1 (15-ounce) can garbanzo beans (chickpeas),
4 cups vegetable broth (or chicken broth)
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 4-ounce can diced green chilies, drained
2 cups frozen corn
Nonstick cooking spray

- Drain and rinse beans. Puree one can of white beans with one cup of broth in blender or food processor.
- Coat a large pot with nonstick cooking spray, sauté onion and garlic over medium heat for 3-5 minutes. Stir often.
- Add pureed bean mixture and all other ingredients to pot. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Garnish with a dollop of reduced fat sour cream.

Nutrition Information :

Calories: 220 Total fat: 2g Saturated fat: 0g
Carbohydrates: 40g Fiber: 9g Protein: 13g

Tip of the Week: Give yourself a holiday gift right now: the time to exercise. It can help you fight holiday weight gain and reduce stress. Build the time into your schedule – three blocks of 10 to 15 minutes each is fine if you can't carve out a longer single time. Allow yourself to cut down on other commitments to free up time in this busy season. To help yourself stick with it, enlist the help of friends who won't let you slide and keep a list of all the reasons you want to exercise.

-- Jennifer LaRue Huget, "Stay Healthy in December", *Lean and Fit* newsletter, www.washingtonpost.com