

Are you at risk?

Dr. Margaret MacKrell Gaglione MD

Obesity is a disease with several behavioral and physiological components. The behaviors we have regarding buying, preparing and eating food will determine whether we become overweight or obese. It is estimated that we make over 200 decisions regarding food every day. If you are not a good planner, or you have no plan of action, those 200 decisions may be poorly made. Let's explore some of the behaviors that put individuals at risk for gaining weight and why these behaviors are risky.

1. **Skipping meals; particularly breakfast**

Waiting until you are hungry to eat, often leads to making inappropriate quick fix choices. Having a good protein breakfast (non sugary cereal with milk, or an egg, or a high protein yogurt) is a better choice than a breakfast composed of a refined simple sugar (donut, waffle, pancake with syrup etc).

2. **Eating out frequently.**

Having more than one meal per week prepared at a fast food or chain restaurant is very high risk. Many of my overweight patients eat an average of 3-10 meals out per week. When we eat out we have no idea of the number of calories in the food, and food is frequently given to us in excessively large portions

3. **Not planning your food consumption.**

Successful action entails a successful plan. Bringing your food to work help you avoid the tendency to go out to lunch or worse yet, eat out of the vending machines.

4. **Eating for reasons other than nutrition.**

Food is for nutrition. If we eat because we are bored, tired, lonely, or stressed, we will undoubtedly consume more calories than we need.

5. **Eating when you watch TV, use the computer, or go to the movies.**

The pairing of TV watching, computer use and going to the movies with eating is particularly dangerous. Much like Pavlov's dog in the famous experiment, the trigger to eat with these activities is not hunger but rather the act of turning on the TV, sitting at the computer, or going to the movies. Eat at the table, talk to your family and turn off the TV.

6. Drinking high calorie drinks

Two 20 ounce regular sodas per day will lead to one pound of weight gain per week. Gourmet coffee drinks can be in excess of 600 calories. Fruit juices are full of high fructose corn syrup. It is best to get your fruit juice from real fruit and drink only non caloric drinks.

7. Eating everything you are served regardless of portion size

Being in the “always cleaning your plate” club leads to excess calories. This is another reason eating out at fast food, chain restaurants and buffets is particularly dangerous. They try to entice you with “large portions as a good deal”. Look at the standard serving of a frozen entrée for portion sizing. Your serving of meat should no bigger than your fist and your grains no more than ½ cup cooked per serving.

8. Not eating fruits and vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables are great high volume low calorie food choices. They are particularly good for individuals who like large portions. Consider dividing your plate into fourths and using plain vegetables to fill three out of four sections.

The ability to maintain your weight is increased by practicing good behaviors in buying, preparing and eating food. As with any behavior, the more you practice it, the better results you’ll achieve. In order for healthy eating to become a way of life, it needs to be something you do every day so that the behaviors become automatic and not doing them will feel uncomfortable.