

## Managing Cues

By Sonja Lingo & Christy Bahan

**Cues** consciously or unconsciously “trigger” behaviors. Oftentimes, these behaviors can sabotage your weight loss goals. (*Think: mindlessly munching in front of the t.v.*) We need to think about **WHY** we eat when we are not physically hungry and **WHY** we don’t exercise when we know it’s important. Everyone is different & it is important to identify what cues trigger you to overeat or be physically inactive as they tend to remain constant throughout our lives.

### Examples of Cues:

**Physical** hunger: A sign your body needs to refuel with food. Symptoms = stomach growling, headache, feeling weak/shaky/lightheaded; the feeling *increases* over time.

**Psychological** hunger: You don’t have physical symptoms, but instead, experience food cravings. Cravings tend to only last 15-30 minutes (*decreases* over time), but they can be intense. Often, they come from an environmental cue.

### **Environmental Cues:**

Social cues: Do certain people, parties, or special occasions trigger you to overeat (or drink)?

### External cues:

Does the *sight* or *smell* of food or a *specific food* trigger you to eat? Do certain *places*, certain *activities*, or certain *times of the day* trigger you to eat when you are not physically hungry?

Internal cues: Certain *moods & emotions* can trigger us to eat. Some examples:

Being: tired, stressed, lonely, sad, bored, and even feeling happy (*think celebrations*)!

### Strategies to cope with food cues:

- **Eat only when physically hungry:** before you eat, try rating your level of hunger. (*See the 2<sup>nd</sup> handout for an example of a hunger scale*)
- Find ways to reduce the **visibility & availability** of foods not on your eating plan.
- With psychological hunger, you can either:  
*Eliminate* the cue (i.e. eat only at the table - not in front of the tv), or  
*Adapt* to the cue (i.e. have a specific plan for dining out/parties).

\*It is crucial for you to **develop a plan** to manage your triggers without eating. You need a list of non-food coping strategies in place *before* a craving hits. Keep the list readily available & in plain sight (refrigerator, pantry/cupboard, purse). For a list of 100 ideas of what to do instead of eating, see the 2<sup>nd</sup> handout.

**Continued . . .**

There is a whole area of research on how our environment affects food intake – such as the size of our plate. **Brian Wansink** is a food psychologist from Cornell University who has done this research. For more information on his research & tips for setting your environment up for success, consider checking out either of his books from the library. Here are a couple of links to his YouTube videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64fSgx2TClc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFigEQgkxSQ>

**Strategies to cope with Physical Inactivity cues:**

Technology has made our lifestyles more sedentary (*i.e.* “*sitting is the new smoking*”). The #1 reason people give for not exercising is: lack of time. Yet, we all get 24 hours in a day. Those who find the time make it a priority. The following link is to a TED talk with tips on how to take control of you free time.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/laura\\_vanderkam\\_how\\_to\\_gain\\_control\\_of\\_your\\_free\\_time#t-699037](https://www.ted.com/talks/laura_vanderkam_how_to_gain_control_of_your_free_time#t-699037)

Some tips to limit sedentary cues & build activity cues:

- Schedule your exercise time on your calendar as if it was an important appointment.
- Even 10 minutes, 3 times per day can be beneficial when you don’t have a 30-60 minute block of time.
- Find ways to be more active during your day: take the stairs or park further away from a building. If you have a desk job, take standing/stretching breaks each hour.
- If you can’t afford a gym membership: you can walk or try calisthenics – not only in a small amount of space, but even when traveling!
- If you walk, try wearing a pedometer. Those that do, report that it is a motivator.
- Find support. Those who exercise with someone else are less likely to quit & more likely to push themselves.
- Involve the family. Engage in a walk after dinner or games at family gatherings; you can be the support others in your family need to be more active.
- Find ways to be social with friends that do not revolve around food (& drinks).
- The key to sticking with exercise is to find an activity you enjoy!

**Start Making Your Own Plan:**

Describe a cue/trigger you struggle with & need to work on:	Describe how you will eliminate or adapt to the cue/trigger:
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.