SUBCONSCIOUS EATING
FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE OUR EATING BEHAVIOR

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OVERVIEW:

• Introduction: overeating in America

• Emotions and eating
  – Controlling emotional eating

• Environmental eating cues
  – Controlling environmental cues

• Wrapping up
Introduction

- More than 2/3 of Americans are overweight or obese
- Adopting healthier diet and exercise habits is an important step in weight management
- Subconscious eating is a problem most Americans face in that they consume excessive amounts of food without even realizing it
- Understanding how our emotions and environment may influence subconscious eating can help us prevent overeating
Emotional Eating
Emotional Eating

“Stress may add bite to appetite in women: a laboratory study of stress-induced cortisol and eating behavior”

– E. Epel, R. Lapidus, B. McEwen, K. Brownell
Eating and Stress

• Binge eating often occurs as a coping mechanism for times of high stress

• Chronically elevated cortisol levels associated with stress have been shown to increase consumption of foods high in fats and sugar

• High fat, sugary foods have been shown to inhibit parts of the brain responsible for processing stress and other negative emotions. “comfort food”
Emotional Eating cont.

• “From Fan to Fat? Vicarious Losing Increases Unhealthy Eating, but Self-Affirmation Is an Effective Remedy”
  – Y. Cornil, P. Chandon
Emotional Eating: Solving the problem

- Physical hunger vs emotional hunger
  - Physical hunger is gradual, not sudden
  - Emotional hunger generally includes specific cravings
  - Physical hunger can wait, emotional hunger feels like it needs to be satisfied instantly
  - Emotional eating is more likely to lead to overeating and feelings of guilt
Emotional Eating: Solving the problem

- Managing emotional eating
  - Learn to recognize true hunger
  - Learn to reduce your stress
  - Know your triggers
  - Exercise
  - Distract yourself
  - Healthful food interference
  - Accept reality
Environmental Eating Cues

**TOO BIG TO GULP**

How America’s sodas got so friggin’ huge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>7 ounces</td>
<td>Original size of a McDonald’s Coke, today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>12 ounces</td>
<td>McDonald’s kid-sized soda, today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>21 ounces</td>
<td>Largest McDonald’s soda, today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>32 ounces</td>
<td>7-11 Big Gulp, dropped in 2004 as part of a “healthy lifestyle initiative”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>42 ounces</td>
<td>McDonald’s Supersize, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>64 ounces</td>
<td>KFC Mega Jug, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>100 ounces</td>
<td>Kum &amp; Go’s HuMUGous, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>128 ounces</td>
<td>7-11 Team Gulp, nearly twice the size of a two-liter bottle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Still thirsty? You’d have to order two.
- Average 8-year-old’s bladder capacity: 10 ounces
- Average adult’s bladder capacity: 20 ounces
- Slogan: “Freedom of choice”
- $1 donated for juvenile diabetes research for each one sold
- When full of Coke, it contains 1,200 calories and 0.7 pounds of sugar.
Environmental Cues and Eating

• The amount of food we eat is influenced by our environment in two distinct ways
  1. Suggesting norms for appropriate serving sizes
  2. Providing external, rather than internal cues for satiety
Environmental Cues and Eating cont.

• Consumption norms
  – Food packaging sizes
  – Larger portion sizes in restaurants
  – Larger plating
  – Larger kitchenware
  – Taller drinking glasses
Environmental Cues and Eating cont.

- Consumption monitoring
  - Eating until the plate is empty
  - Eating until a television show or event is over
  - Eating because of convenience or boredom
  - Multitasking
  - Eating in groups
  - Luring labeling
Consumption monitoring cont.

- **Bottomless Bowls: Why Visual Cues of Portion Size May Influence Intake**
  - B Wansink, J Painter, J North
Decreasing Consumption Norms

• Use smaller plates and tall skinny glasses
• Buy smaller packages or repackage into smaller containers
• Avoid buying in bulk or stockpiling food
• Keep healthier foods in view and hide unhealthy options
Increasing Consumption Monitoring

- Take smaller portions (and go back for seconds if you still need them later)
- Do not rely on visual cues to determine when to stop eating
- Be mindful of the quality of your food and check to make sure you are enjoying it
- If you must eat while doing something else, pay close attention to the portions you serve yourself
Wrapping up

- Emotions and environmental cues will always influence the types and amounts of foods that we eat.
- Becoming aware of the influence that these factors play on our eating habits, and attempting to control our eating environment can help reduce overeating and hopefully lead to better weight management.
REFERENCES


• Elissa Epel, Rachel Lapidus, Bruce McEwen, Kelly Brownell Stress may add bite to appetite in women: a laboratory study of stress-induced cortisol and eating behavior Psychoneuroendocrinology, Volume 26, Issue 1, January 2001, Pages 37–49


Questions?