



In With the Good

To drop pounds, you need to focus on what you can add to your diet, not what you can't.

by GALE MALESKEY, R.D.
photos: KATHRYN GAMBLE

accentuate the positive. That's what weight-loss experts learned when they worked with overweight study participants. Doctors couldn't just tell people all the foods they shouldn't eat. Patients weren't acting on it. But once researchers focused on what dieters could do, such as choose fruit before junk food, and activity before couch time, results improved dramatically.

It's part of the "positive psychology" movement—focusing on strengths and positive behaviors, not problems. "This approach creates less stress by focusing on what you can do, not what you can't," says Martin Binks, Ph.D., director of behavioral health at the Duke Diet & Fitness Center, in Durham, North Carolina.

Dr. David Kessler, author of *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite* and former U.S. Food and Drug commissioner, puts

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Remember when you were a kid and someone told you that you weren't allowed to have something? That made you want it all the more. Food is like that, too.



LOSE WEIGHT, GAIN HEALTH

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it another way. "It doesn't work to just say you can't have something, because junk food can be an extremely powerful stimulus," he says. "You need to have something else you want more." With that in mind, here are ways to crowd out the bad with the good.

SHOP VIRTUOUSLY Load up on healthy foods and reduce mindless eating cues. We want to eat what we see, and cookies on the counter have conditioned many of us to want junk. To calm this automatic response, put the healthy foods in plain view. Keep a bowl of fruit on the counter and a dish of cut-up veggies and healthy dip in the fridge.

ADD IN A SCENIC ROUTE Don't even go near that drive-through window. "Location is a stronger cue than many of us realize when it comes to conditioned eating," Kessler says. "You may not even realize what you're doing until you're too stimulated to stop. Bypass your favorite fast-food place altogether by taking a different path around it."

LET ANGER BE YOUR ALLY It may seem odd to suggest adding anger to your dieting efforts, but it's vital to changing how you think about food, Kessler says. "You realize that you've been being manipulated into overeating by foods that are hyper-palatable—loaded with fat, sugar, and salt—and

by portions that are too big," he says. "You start to see these foods as the enemy and you don't want them."

SCHEDULE HUNGRY TIMES If you have cravings at certain times of the day, add in more food, not less. Plan a healthy, calorie-controlled snack for those moments, says Binks. "Don't try to power through it or distract yourself," he says.

SUBSTITUTE SASS FOR SILENCE Anger or sadness can create anxiety, and many women eat to relieve that feeling, says Denise Lamothe, a psychologist and author of *The Taming of the Chew: A Holistic Guide to Stopping Compulsive Eating*. Sugary, fatty foods actually do reduce stress hormone levels temporarily. But it's better to deal with the real issue. "The solution is to recognize and respect your feelings, and learn to say what is on your mind," Lamothe says.

CHANGE HORIZONS At Duke's Diet & Fitness Center, some people learned an unusual diet strategy—bird-watching. "It may not be aerobic, but it gets people outside and interested in something else," Binks says. Make a list of things you love to do that don't include eating. Keep it in your purse or pocket. "When you're tempted to eat something you don't need, look at the list and pick something you enjoy even more," Lamothe says.

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