

The Behavior Chain

You have probably noticed by now that certain behaviors trigger other behaviors. That is, that there is often a chain of events that leads you to want to eat for reasons other than hunger. The key to handling a behavior chain that may lead you to overeating is first to recognize what is going on. For example, perhaps you know that when you enter the kitchen after you return from work in the evening you want to eat. The chain of events goes like this:

You walk into the kitchen. Immediately you start to think about food. You see an open bag of potato chips on the counter next to the stove. You go to the stove, begin cooking dinner, and reach for the chips. Before you know it the bag is half empty.

Breaking the Chain

Avoid going into the kitchen immediately after work. If you have two entrances to your home, go in through the door that is not in the kitchen. If you must enter through the kitchen – do just that, walk through the kitchen to another room.

Find an activity to keep you occupied for a least ten minutes, even if you are legitimately hungry. Remind yourself that it is okay to feel hungry. You are not going to pass out just because you are feeling hunger pangs – which you plan to satisfy soon.

You can go to your room and phone a friend or change into sweats and do ten minutes of stretching exercises. Talk to your kids. Water the plants. Sit in a chair, close your eyes and relax for ten blissful minutes. The only thing you can't do is step foot into the kitchen – not yet. After ten minutes, the urge may very well have passed.

Planning for Success

But what if you try to break the chain and it just doesn't work? What if you eat a planned snack at work, walk right through the kitchen, stay out for ten minutes, keep all the snacks out of sight and still feel an uncontrollable urge to binge?

First, use self talk to combat what feels like an overwhelming urge at the moment. Ask yourself what you are doing and why. Remind yourself how you will feel after the deed is done. Do you really want to return to old behaviors? Will that make you feel happy with yourself? The answer, as you know, is a resounding NO. Remind yourself of how hard you have worked to come so far, of the new behaviors you have been working on, and the new approach to eating that you now have.