

Factors effecting eating bouts?

Background

People don't eat foods at regular rates. Sometimes we eat a lot of a particular food (cake, or oranges, or ice cream) and then don't eat it for another month or so. These are referred to as eating bouts and they typically involve eating at least 3 times as much of the food as we normally do.

Although we usually eat simply because we're hungry, eating bouts can be stimulated by (1) our emotions, or (2) when the food is sitting out. These are referred to as being either internally-stimulated (by emotions), or externally-stimulated (by sights or smells)

People who start an eating bout because of their emotions usually eat more and feel worse afterwards. People who eat a food simply because it's sitting out generally do not regret eating the food, and they believe the food "tastes better."

Although we tend to associate eating bouts with unhealthy products, they also occur with healthy products (such as fruits and vegetables). Putting healthy products in convenient places increases the likelihood we will eat them instead of the ice cream.

Three factors that can help you manage eating bouts are:

- Be aware of those specific factors that can stimulate eating bouts. For example, make food less available and out of sight.
- Be informed about the ways to minimize eating bouts stimulated by moods and cravings.
- Realize that once eating bouts begin, they are not guided by reason, and often continue until the product is gone.

Key Teaching Point

- Eating bouts often occur because either we are feeling down or because the food is sitting out.
- Replace the cookie jar with a bowl of fruit. It will increase fruit consumption and decrease the temptation of the cookies.
- If it's not around, you won't eat it

Student Demonstration

Before the session, make an overhead with the following brief explanation:

Eating bouts are defined as dramatic increase in the volume of a certain food than what is normally consumed. These eating bouts are often triggered by internal or external cues.

- *Internal cues are things such as mood, hunger or boredom.*
- *External cues are things that you can see or smell.*

When someone eats more of a certain food than normal because they are depressed (internal cue), it is usually perceived as less reasonable, less healthy, less enjoyable and involves a large volume of food. However, if you eat more of the food because it is sitting there (external cue), people are more aware of its nutritional value.

Now ask the students to consider the following situations and determine what cued the eating bout.

- *You just found out your best friend is moving. You come home from school and decide to have some cookies. Before you know it the entire bag of cookies is gone. Generally after school you only have few cookies.*
- *You come home from school and your mother has just made a fresh batch of cookies. You help yourself to the plateful of cookies. You generally don't eat the whole plate but they smelled so good.*

After determining what may have triggered the eating bouts, ask the students to brainstorm how they could better manage these situations.

Wansink, Brian (1994), "Antecedents and Mediators of Eating Bouts," *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 23:2 (December), 166-82.

