

Eating too much is often part of a chain of thoughts, feelings, actions, and other cues. Here is an example:

- Sue bought a bag of cookies when she went food shopping.
- She left the bag of cookies on the kitchen counter.
- At work on Monday, she skipped lunch because of a deadline.
- She came home that night feeling stressed, tired, and very hungry.
- She went into the kitchen and saw the cookies.
- She thought, "I deserve a treat after a day like today."
- She took the cookies to the living room, sat on the couch, and turned on the TV.
- She ate half of the bag of cookies.
- She thought, "I'm such a failure."
- She felt guilty and ashamed.
- She ate the rest of the bag of cookies.

Each step is like a link in the chain. Break the chain at any link, and you can prevent overeating. It's best to break the chain very early. That is when you have the most control – and more chances to break the chain.

Here are some ways that Sue could have broken the chain.

Links in the Chain	Ways She Could Have Broken the Chain
Sue bought a bag of cookies when she went food shopping.	<i>She could have bought only single-portion treats.</i>
She left the bag of cookies on the kitchen counter.	<i>She could have put fruit or other healthy snacks on the counter instead.</i>
On Monday at work, she skipped lunch because of a deadline.	<i>She could avoid skipping meals by keeping healthy snacks or meal-replacement shakes on hand.</i>
She came home after work feeling stressed, tired, and very hungry.	<i>She could have eaten a piece of fruit, done some deep breathing, and stretched lightly to calm down.</i>
She went into the kitchen and saw the cookies.	<i>She could have stored less healthy foods where she couldn't see them.</i>
She thought, "I deserve a treat after a day like today."	<i>She could have kept a list of non-food treats to pick from at times like this.</i>
She took the cookies to the living room, sat on the couch, and turned on the TV.	<i>She could have taken a single serving and stored the rest.</i>
She ate half of the bag of cookies.	<i>She could have avoided eating while watching TV.</i>
She thought, "I'm such a failure."	<i>She could have talked back with thoughts about her overall success.</i>
She felt guilty and ashamed.	<i>She could have taken a walk or done something that helped her feel good about herself.</i>
She ate the rest of the bag of cookies.	<i>She could have learned from what she had done, thought through the chain, and planned ways to break it the next time.</i>



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Ten Tips for Breaking the Chain

Here are some tried-and-true ways to prevent overeating.

1. Avoid the places in which you tend to overeat. Common examples are all-you-can-eat buffets and fast food restaurants. At a party, stand away from the table with the food.
2. Don't let yourself get too hungry. Eat three healthy meals and two healthy snacks per day, at regular times. Carry healthy snacks with you if you are likely to be late for a meal.
3. Don't deprive yourself of favorite "treats." Eat them in small amounts, now and then.
4. Make a long list of nonfood ways to enjoy yourself. Do something on the list when you are bored, lonely, or upset. Take up a new hobby. Call a friend. Play a sport.
5. Eat slowly and mindfully. Take time to enjoy your food. Avoid watching TV while you eat.
6. Keep tempting foods out of sight, such as behind cupboard doors. Or, don't bring them into the house. Or, buy them in single-serving packages, one at a time.
7. Portion out a single serving of a tempting snack, like cookies or chips, into a small bowl. Put the rest away before you eat. Don't eat snacks out of the bag or package.
8. Keep healthy snacks like cut-up vegetables and fresh fruit in sight and ready to eat.
9. Find healthy ways to handle stress and your emotions or moods. Take a brisk walk. Talk to someone supportive. Take a few deep breaths. Learn to meditate or do yoga.
10. Talk back to negative thoughts with positive ones. After overeating, remember that you can return to healthy eating at your next meal. Take one day at a time, and stay positive.

Take Action

Now think of a recent time you overate. Write down the links in the chain. Then, for each link, write down one way you could have broken the chain.

Links in the Chain	Ways to Break the Chain



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