

Week 13: Walk to Wellness

Social Cues

Social cues are occasions that **trigger** us to behave in a certain way when we're around other **people**. For example, watching a football game with friends is a social cue for many people to eat snacks and drink beer or soda. Social cues sometimes make it hard to stay on track with healthy goals.

Our responses to social cues are usually habits we've formed over a long time. Usually those habits are hard to change. However, this program will show you how to do so.

Dealing with Social Cues

The best way to overcome social cues is to **stay away** from them. But staying away is not always possible. In such a case, we can try changing the cue or responding differently to it.

Not all social cues are problems, however. Some social cues will help you eat healthier and be more active.

The Special Events Challenge

Social cues are particularly strong at special events such as parties, holidays, or vacations. In addition, having guests in our home or being a guest in someone else's home can give us an excuse to overeat. Try to expect the difficulties that may occur, and plan ahead.

Staying the Course

Remember that it takes time to break an old habit or to build a new one. Change does not happen overnight. With social cues, at least two people are involved in making a change: you and someone else.

Having another person involved makes the change more difficult because we cannot expect other people to adjust instantly to our new way of thinking. Stay positive. Think of every social event as a chance to learn what works well for you and what does not.

Remember, you are building healthy habits for a lifetime.

Examples of Social Cues

Social cues are occasions that trigger us to behave in a certain way. They involve **other people**, not just ourselves. When we react to a social cue in the same way over and over, we build a **habit**. The other person has also learned a habit. When two people are involved, breaking a habit is even harder than when it is just you who must adjust to change.

Problem social cues	Examples in your life
The sight of other people eating problem foods or being inactive.	
Being offered (or pressured to eat) problem foods.	
Being invited to do something inactive such as watch a movie and eat popcorn.	
Hearing complaints, especially about eating or not eating something.	

Examples of Social Cues (continued)

Not all social cues are problems, however. Below are some examples of helpful social cues:

Helpful social cues	Examples
The sight of other people eating healthy foods or being active.	
Being offered healthy foods or invited to do something active.	
Being praised.	

Dealing With Problem Social Cues

We can change social cues. Or we can change how we react to them.

- ❑ Stay away from the cue, if you can.
 - ✓ For example, move to a different room when someone is eating a tempting food.
 - ✓ Spend time with people in ways that do not involve eating.
- ❑ Change the cue, if you can.
 - ✓ Discuss the problem with those involved.
 - ✓ Think of other options.
 - ✓ Tell the other person about the program and your efforts to lose weight and be more active.
 - ✓ Ask others for support. Ask them to praise you for your efforts and to ignore your slips.
- ❑ Practice responding in healthier ways to offers of unhealthy food.
 - ✓ Say “No, thank you.”
 - ✓ Respond in a gentle but firm manner.
 - ✓ Suggest something they can do to help you. For example, “No, thanks. But I would love a glass of ice water or a diet soda.”

Remember, it takes time to change habits.

Social Cues at Special Events

Social cues are powerful at special events such as parties or weddings. Sometimes, social events can —

- ✓ Upset our routine.
- ✓ Challenge us with unusual food and social cues.
- ✓ Involve habits that were formed over many years and so are strong.

To manage social cues at special events, try these ideas:

Options	Examples
Plan ahead.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Eat something before the event, so you won't be hungry.✓ Plan your meal in advance.✓ Budget your fat grams ahead of time. Plan to eat the best (in small portions) and leave the rest.✓ Bring a tasty, low-fat dish to share.
Stay away from problem cues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Stand as far away as you can from the table with the food.✓ Keep your hands busy with a glass of water, coffee, tea, or diet soda.✓ Watch the alcohol. It lowers your willpower and makes you hungry.✓ Clear the table as soon as possible after a meal, and put the food away.
Change problem cues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Discuss your goals with your family, friends, guests, host, or hostess.✓ Ask others to praise your efforts and to ignore your slips.
Respond to problem cues in a more healthy way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Practice a polite but firm, "No, thank you."✓ Suggest something else they can do to help you. "No thanks, but I would love a glass of ice water or a diet soda."
Add helpful cues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Serve healthy foods at home. Bring healthy foods to share at other people's homes.✓ Use low-fat products to lower the fat in favorite recipes. Try some new, low-fat recipes.✓ Ask a friend or family member for support (split dessert with you, take a walk together, offer you healthy food choices).✓ Plan things to do that are active and don't involve food.

Adding Helpful Social Cues

Some social cues are helpful for staying on track. Here are a few:

- Spend time with people who are already active and make healthy food choices.
- Put yourself in places where people are active.
- Set up a regular date with others to be active.
- Ask your friends to call you to remind you to be active.
- Bring a low-fat or low-calorie dish to share when you go to a dinner party.
- Be the first to order when you eat out at a restaurant.
- Be social by doing something active. Take a walk and talk.