

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Habits that Pack On Pounds”

An estimated 45 million Americans go on some sort of diet each year. The path to weight loss is rife with surprise twists and turns. Most weight-loss advice focuses on improving your diet and getting more exercise. These strategies are effective, but they’re also arguably difficult to turn into long-term habits. Here are some harmless health habits that might actually be causing you to pack on the pounds and push your health goals out of reach. **Eating Off A Large Plate.** For better portion control, use a smaller dish, experts say. Study participants with larger bowls ate 31% more ice cream on average than those with smaller bowls. Furthermore, participants with larger spoons served themselves 14.5% more ice cream than those with smaller spoons, regardless of bowl size. When selecting plates from the buffet line, patrons with an estimated higher body mass index (BMI) were more likely to select larger plates than patrons with estimated lower BMIs. **Drinking Diet Soda.** Soft-drinks made with artificial sweeteners, like aspartame and saccharin, may help you feel like you’re dodging a sugary bullet, but these beloved beverages have health repercussions. In one study published in the *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*, diet soda was found to increase cravings for sugary foods. Diet soda intake was associated with a wider waist. Those who drank diet soda had significantly larger waist circumferences than those who didn’t, even after adjusting for demographics, physical activity, and diabetes diagnoses. **Eating With Others.** According to a new review, how you eat is closely linked to whom you eat with. Our dining habits tend to mirror those of the people with whom we share meals, because conforming to group norms is adaptive and psychologically rewarding. The study authors describe this phenomenon, called the social-facilitation of eating: “If we eat with someone who is eating a large amount, then we are likely to model what they eat and consume more than we would eat if we were dining alone.” **Forgoing A Dietary “Rest” Period.** Endless dieting can be detrimental to your weight-loss goals. Taking periodic breaks from your diet may result in more efficient weight loss. Researchers recommend an intermittent approach, consisting of 2-week calorie restriction cycles interspersed with maintenance periods of the same length. **Sleeping In A Warm Room.** Warm and cozy homes are not ideal environments for weight loss. Researchers found that regular exposure to mildly cold air can help people lose weight, because energy expenditure increases when our bodies work to control temperature.

In the America that I love, we should use portion control and prepare most of our meals at home. Try to avoid packaged, processed foods. A successful diet is based on it being easily followed.

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