

Webinar 3 Handout: **TRIGGERS & CONTROLS**

Everyone has their own unique set of taste buds, metabolism, eating patterns and “tummy issues” (hold the onions please!). Everyone also reacts differently to their environments. I’m not just talking about in the kitchen or at the dinner table. If you think about it, your food environment is everywhere because food is everywhere! Having control of your environment is essential to living a Nutritious Life. In order to take control of your environment you first need to understand *why* you eat or overeat when you aren’t hungry or it’s not meal time. There are loads of factors at play in the environment that influence your food decisions. I help people identify the *triggers* in their environments that lead them to overeat and come up with *controls* they can use to overcome those *triggers*.

Triggers

Triggers are what cause you to start eating for reasons other than hunger and nutrition. They’re the hot buttons that usually lead to overeating, eating when you’re not hungry, and/or choosing unhealthy foods. The best way to avoid making poor food choices is by recognizing what triggers you to make them. Once you understand your triggers, you can come up with ways to overcome them.

Common triggers include:

- Boredom
- Drinking alcohol
- Being in front of the TV or computer
- Dining out socially
- Ending a meal (always leads to dessert)
- Fatigue
- Feeding the kids
- Grocery shopping (or not grocery shopping)
- Not exercising
- Seeing commercials for food
- Seeing food on social media
- Skipping breakfast or skipping a snack
- Stress
- Waiting too long to eat

Note: Sometimes a trigger is a craving. When appropriate I use these terms interchangeably.

Example: A craving for chocolate can trigger a chocolate binge.

Food Controls

Controls are what you can use to overcome triggers. They're what you can depend on to keep you from overeating. Controls *can* be food - sometimes your body really *is* hungry and needs food, just not the food you're craving. This is when you use food controls. The right food control is a healthy choice that will satisfy the specific craving you have, like sweet or salty.

Example food controls are:

- Air popped popcorn
- Artichoke hearts
- Celery
- Fennel
- Herbal tea
- Seaweed snacks
- Seltzer with lime/lemon
- Small bowl of berries or frozen grapes

Sometimes a specific craving is so strong (potato chips anyone?) that trying to ignore it or “eat around” it will result in overeating. Having a small portion of the exact item you are actually craving can be appropriate here. Just be sure that this is the exception, *not* the rule in your overall diet. This is what I call a “conscious indulgence”. For some clients, I suggest having the healthiest version of the food that's being craved. You client gets regular hankerings for French fries? Baked sweet potato fries may probably do the trick.

Non-Food Controls

Lots of times when you encounter a trigger (it could be a food trigger such as smelling a freshly baked chocolate chip cookie or an emotional trigger like getting in an argument with your other half) your body isn't hungry. This is when you turn to a non-food control. These are activities or items that will occupy you until you overcome the trigger. A non-food control is an empowering behavior that acts like a distraction from or replacement for the food that you'd normally crave.

Example non-food controls are:

- Applying hand moisturizer
- Brushing teeth
- Calling a friend or family member to talk
- Cleaning the house
- Doing planks
- Hula hooping
- Journaling
- Knitting/crocheting
- Listening to music while driving/walking by trigger restaurants/advertisements
- Painting nails
- Working on a jigsaw puzzle

WHAT ARE YOUR TRIGGERS AND CONTROLS?

Help clients identify what *triggers* them to eat, and what *controls* will work for them. Remember, each client has a unique story and personal diet history. Clients may have very different reactions to similar triggers, and not all controls will work for everyone. Work with each person individually to figure out what fits best into his/her own personal lifestyle.

Example: Watching TV at night might trigger him/her to have a sweet snack. This most likely has nothing to do with real hunger and sipping a cup of herbal tea may work. This is a food control! Or maybe this person is just used to doing something with his/her hands while watching TV. Doing a craft or cleaning the kitchen may keep this person from reaching into a bag of chips or cookies again and again. These are non-food controls!

Use the chart on the next page (a blank template has also been provided) when working with clients to help them identify and keep track of common triggers, and come up with one, two or even three food controls and one, two or even three non-food controls that they can depend on in those situations. In the first row you will see an example.

TRIGGER	FOOD CONTROL	NON-FOOD CONTROL
<i>Stress</i>	<i>Crudite</i> <i>3 cups air popped popcorn</i>	<i>Shower with lavender spray</i> <i>Meditation</i> <i>Phone call to a friend</i>

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