

Speed Eating Gains Weight

If your waistband gets tighter with every holiday party, give yourself a ticket — for speed eating. It's tempting to blame your aunt's triple-chocolate rum balls and that box of sugar cookies in the office coffee room, but a compelling new study suggests that how fast you eat may be as important as what you put on your plate.

Researchers already know that speed-eaters are twice as likely to be overweight as those who munch in a leisurely fashion. Now they know why: Scarfing down food reduces the release of appetite-regulating hormones into your bloodstream. These chemicals normally tell your brain to get your hand off of those sugar cookies, pronto. On one day of the new Athens University study, volunteers wolfed down two-and-a-half scoops of ice cream in five minutes; on another, they made the treat last for 30 minutes. The scientists measured blood levels of two types of appetite-lowering hormones — PYY and GLP-1 — before and after, and discovered that when people savored their ice cream slowly, the levels of appetite-regulating hormones were 25 to 30 percent higher. PYY and GLP-1 are two of more than a dozen hormones responsible for making you feeling full and satisfied. Other mechanisms, such as stretch receptors in the lining of your stomach, play important roles, too. Fortunately, we know more than ever about how these checks and balances work—and how modern food choices and eating habits can short-circuit them. There's no better time to help your body's natural appetite control system. Here's how:

"Spoil" your dinner with a handful of nuts. Munching on the right snack, such as 70 calories of nuts, 20 minutes before a meal jump-starts the release of feel-full hormones, so you eat less when you get to the table. Great choices: six walnut halves toasted for about 9 minutes at 275 degrees, 12 almonds or 20 peanuts.

Begin with a crunch. Your stomach can stretch only so far — take advantage. Filling it with raw veggies activates stretch receptors that signal your brain that you're full. Studies have found that people who start meals with a large, low-cal salad eat 12 percent fewer calories during the meal than those who don't.

Dine in the slow lane. Take small bites, chew thoroughly and put utensils down between bites. Fill your senses — notice the colors, aromas, flavors, textures and temperatures of foods before and while you eat them.

Fill your tank only to 80 percent. Ever notice that when you eat till your buttons burst, your stomach feels fuller and fuller for nearly an hour afterward? That's delayed-reaction satiety. Harness it by stopping your next meal when you're just 80 percent full. Wait 20 minutes and you'll feel fully satisfied. In Japan, they call this trick *ham hachi bu* and consider it a key to longevity.