

By Lacy Wolff, ERS Health Promotion Administrator



March is National Nutrition month, a time when we are reminded to eat healthy. But making lasting changes in your diet can be difficult to do, especially if you are used to eating a certain way. What drives our eating behavior? The way we eat is sometimes influenced by the way we grew up.

Here are a few common examples of how lifelong bad eating habits are built:

Clean your plate. This is a phrase that I, along with likely millions of adults, heard as a child. It created a habit that is still hard to break.

You can have dessert if you finish all your food. This is another bad habit that sets us up to be lifelong *dessert-after-dinner eaters*, spiking our blood sugar and decreasing the quality of your sleep.

There are times when I used strategies like these with my own children, with the best intentions, of course! I didn't want to have to feed my kids again when they would inevitably be hungry within the hour. I didn't want to waste food. I wanted desperately for them to eat the nutrients that I knew they needed. Some might see this as a parenting "fail." But my new understanding of what drives our family's eating habits presented an opportunity. I now could work with my family's existing mindset around eating to build healthier habits.

Here are a few very simple strategies that I find useful:

For the Clean the Plate Club:

1. Intentionally eat from a small plate. This way you will still get the satisfaction of cleaning your plate without changing the habit.
2. Before you go back for seconds set a time for 10 minutes and ask yourself, "Am I really hungry right now?"
3. Slow down and notice what you are eating. While it sounds so simple, eating fast to get to the clean plate causes us to miss so much of the enjoyment of eating.

For the dessert-after-dinner lovers:

1. Try eating a piece of dark chocolate with some strawberries or blackberries to fulfill the craving. This snack has less sugar while adding foods rich with antioxidants.
2. Have a cup of herbal tea or sparkling water when you feel the craving come on. Replacing the sugar with another behavior will eventually seem normal.
3. Remember that cravings are like waves on an ocean. They come and go, and they have peaks and valleys. Notice what they feel like and see if you can ride the wave.

If you are interested in learning more tips and tricks to improve your nutrition, I hope you will join us for this month's [wellness webinars](#) where we will be focusing on these and other strategies, along with some live cooking demonstrations.

If you are looking for more support for improving your nutrition, check out the wellness programs available to you through your health plan. If you are a HealthSelect participant, you have access to Naturally Slim and Real Appeal at no cost. Both of these evidence-based programs focus on changing habits. Full details and qualification information can be found through the [HealthSelect website](#).

If you are a Scott and White participant, you have access to Naturally Slim at no cost as long if you have a BMI of 23 or higher. Full details can be found through the [Scott and White Health Plan website](#).

If you have any questions regarding any of these programs please feel free to email me directly at lacy.wolff@ers.texas.gov.