



***SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS***  
Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated  
Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service  
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

## **Leader Training Guide**

### **Designing Healthy Food Environments so the Healthy Choice is the Easy Choice**

**Objectives:** At the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the impact of environment on eating habits.
2. Identify one change to make to create a healthier food environment at home.

**Lesson Overview/Introduction:** According to behavioral economist and food psychologist, Brian Wansink each day we make over 200 food related decisions and many, if not most, are subconscious decisions. Almost everywhere we go food and drink are advertised or are available. By examining your eating habits and food environment then making small inexpensive changes you can make the healthy choice the easy choice for you and your family.

**Lesson:** Even if you enjoy eating healthy foods and have nutrition knowledge, relying on willpower to control your weight or reach health goals takes constant vigilance and can be exhausting. Over the past several decades exposure to, availability of, and variety of foods has skyrocketed. These changes encourage us to eat more food. Nowadays we can buy food almost anywhere. We need tools and strategies to counterbalance this world of persuasion and influence on our eating behavior. Regardless of educational level, constant exposure to foods, large packages, large servings, and large dinnerware influence us to eat more. It is much easier to change your environment than to try to overcome subconscious behaviors. This lesson will focus on making small changes in your home environment and using strategies in restaurants, to make it easier to resist temptation, control your weight, reach your health goals, and/or raise healthy kids.

Setting personal policies for yourself, based on your lifestyle, can also help you reach your goals. It is important to note that there is no "one best change" that everyone can or should make. The tips in this lesson are examples of what have worked for some. However, any changes should be specific to you and your life. What works for one person might not work for another.

A personal policy is a guideline you set for yourself to follow. No one needs to know about it, and no one knows if you follow it but yourself. Putting keys in a specific place is an example. Below are some strategies used by the lesson's author to help limit food influences and temptations. These are shared as examples only, yours may be different.

- Keeps candy out of sight and reach.
- All dressings made with more vinegar than oil.
- Meals at home are eaten on a salad plate, using a salad fork.
- No deep-frying of food at home.

## Strategies for a Healthier Food Environment

1. Make your kitchen less loungeable: When people hang out in the kitchen they eat more. Move your social setting to another room, including the television. Evaluate if you have added activities (such as a desk or computer) not related to cooking into your kitchen. If so, move them to another place in the house.
2. Make tempting foods “invisible”: The old saying “out of sight out of mind” applies here. Put cookies, snacks, cereals, and high calorie foods in a hard to reach cabinet, cover in aluminum foil, or place in opaque containers. In the fridge put ready-to-eat veggies in clear containers, put high calorie snacks and deserts in the crisper or in packages where you can’t readily see the contents. People who have visible snacks report gaining more weight than those who don’t.
3. Keep counters organized and clear of clutter. Keep only fruit (& vegetables) on the counter to be used as grab and go snacks; not cereal, cookies, chips, or soda.
4. First seen is often first eaten. Make the healthy choice the first thing you see when walking in the kitchen. In the refrigerator, freezer and cupboards store the healthy foods in a ready-to-eat form in the most visible place so it is the default choice. Oatmeal prominently placed in a cupboard is a good influence on food choices. The fridge might have precut ready to eat vegetables in a clear container placed front and center, and the freezer might have frozen vegetables positioned as the first thing you see when opening the door (covering the ice cream and cool whip.)
5. Evaluate tableware and glasses: As B. Wansink puts it, big bowls and plates make big people. Use 9-10 inch plates or smaller. This makes proper portion sizes look bigger. Using smaller serving bowls and serving utensils leads to smaller servings. Serve children under 12 using smaller plates, bowls, and glasses than adults. (demonstrate glass or bowl activity here).
6. Evaluate your cookbooks. A review of the Joy of Cooking from 1937 - 2006 revealed that the portion sizes and amounts of fat, sugar, meat, and high calorie ingredients have increased. This leads to recipes in the 2006 book having 44% more calories than the 1937 book. When using modern recipes go ahead and plan to separate out what is appropriate for your family to eat at one sitting and package the rest for lunches or a meal later in the week.
7. Expand the MyPlate concept of making half your plate vegetables and fruits to your shopping basket. Using your purse, jacket, or store flyer to divide your shopping buggy in half and make half your basket vegetables and fruits, whether fresh, frozen or canned. By making your buggy look like MyPlate you will have the foods on hand to make snacks and meals look like MyPlate (Show picture of MyPlate or draw the class’ attention to a posted version)
8. Restaurants & Dining Out: Research in this area has given valuable information on how to dine out strategically. Wansink’s team looked at behaviors thin people had in contrast to behaviors of heavy people in different types of restaurants. Tips from this work include:
  - At a buffet, scan all the foods before starting to fill you plate, then start by adding vegetables (Remember MyPlate). Try to sit across the room with your back to the buffet
  - Sitting near a window or in a brightly lit area seems to inspire healthier choices
  - Decide how much food to take home before you start eating. Ask for a take-out box early in the meal.

This mini self-assessment is a short version of the 100-point Home Kitchen Scorecard that can be found on the Slim By Design website (slimbydesign.org). Scorecards have been developed for the workplace, grocery store, restaurants, and schools (Smarter Lunchrooms)

Slim By Design Mini Quiz for Home      Source: Slimbydesign.org

- 1. Salad and vegetables are served first, before the entree and starches are brought to the table.       Yes       No
- 2. The main dish is pre-plated and served from the stove or counter.       Yes       No
- 3. Your dinner plates are 9 to 10 inches wide.       Yes       No
- 4. You eat sitting at a table with the TV turned off.       Yes       No
- 5. There are two or fewer cans of soft drinks in your fridge.       Yes       No
- 6. Your kitchen counters are organized (not cluttered or messy).       Yes       No
- 7. Pre-cut fruits and vegetables can currently be found on your middle refrigerator shelf.       Yes       No
- 8. At least 6 single servings of lean protein are in your fridge (such as eggs, yogurt, tofu, string cheese, sliced turkey, etc).       Yes       No
- 9. Your snacks are kept in one inconveniently-placed cupboard.       Yes       No
- 10. The only food item on your kitchen counter is a fruit bowl.       Yes       No

Personal Policy Challenge

Think about challenges you face with food and identify personal policies that can help you overcome the challenges. The key point is not to deny yourself, but to give structure to avoid pitfalls of willpower. Example: While trying to lose weight a person still wanted something sweet in the afternoon. They decided to do two things: 1) they only ate tootsie roll pops because they took longer to eat. 2) they walked to the store, one block away, and bought one at a time.

My Challenges

My Changes

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## Lesson Summary:

Trying to use willpower alone to navigate the 24/7 nonstop marketing and availability of food is difficult and frustrating. Even when we know better, poor choices can be made because of fatigue, stress, or distractions. Making simple changes in your environment and establishing a few “policies” or guidelines for yourself can help make the healthy choice the easy choice. Research is proving that over time, small changes have a big effect on our health. The goal is to focus on what we can eat by making healthy eating convenient, attractive, and normal. The handout has a 10-point home make over quiz that you can do at home. The children in our lives will also benefit from these strategies and will learn them if exposed on a regular basis.

## Suggested Activities:

1. Have class member’s complete the ten-question quiz and/or the personal policy challenge.
2. Demonstrate portion control and portion visualization with the following activity.  
Supplies: One standard cereal bowl (about 12 ounces), one soup bowl (about 24 ounces), one cup dry measure, one measured cup of cereal (avoid sugary cereal, it’s a nutrition lesson)  
*Activity:* Put 1 cup of cereal (measured) into the smaller bowl. Ask the class if that seemed like a reasonable portion. Then pour the cereal over to the larger bowl and ask the same question. Ask how much cereal they think it is? Tell how much cereal (1 cup) and explain we pour more into larger sized plates, bowls, and glasses, therefore, we eat more when larger bowls, and plates are used. One study on children and cereal found kids poured 42% more cereal into larger bowls.
3. Glass Size Activity: Supplies –  
one 4-ounce juice glass, one jumbo tumbler (24-32 ounces),  
one 12-16 ounce squat glass, one liquid measuring cup,  
one 12-16 tall skinny glass, water or other liquid.

Have 4 ounces of liquid in the juice glass. Show the class and say this is 4 ounces, which is traditionally considered a serving of juice for most types of 100% fruit juice. Pour the 4 ounces into the jumbo tumbler, show the class, and ask. Does the 4 ounces look like enough in this glass? (Answer = No). What would your husband or kids do? (answer = add more). Filling this glass is fine if the beverage is water, seltzer or skim/low-fat milk, but for high calorie beverages like juice, sweet tea and sodas we can be strategic.

Put the two 12-16 ounce glasses (one squat and one tall) on the table, ask the class which one is bigger. Demonstrate that they are the same size by pouring a measured 12 ounces into one glass and then into the other. Say: “We tend to focus on the height of what we pour and not the width, so we pour 12% less into taller glasses than squat glasses. It might be a good strategy to use tall skinny glasses for high calorie beverages.”

## Suggested Materials:

A picture of Choose My Plate on 8.5x11 paper  
Copies of the handout that is page two and three of this lesson.

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Sources/References: Wansink, Brian. Slim by Design: Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life. New York: Harper Collins, 2014. Print.