



Do You REALLY Know How Much You Eat? by Alice Henneman, MS, Registered Dietitian & Extension Educator
<http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/food-reflections.shtml>

We make more than 200 food-related decisions daily, and aren't aware of 90 percent of them, according to Brian Wansink, Ph.D. and director of the Cornell University Food and Brand Lab.

Perhaps you think you just make three food decisions daily: Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Well, think again. We choose how much milk to pour on cereal, whether to have a second piece of toast, if we want to add sugar to our cereal, and if so, how much and what type, and if we'll eat that doughnut at the office, and on and on and on

"Most of us don't overeat because we're hungry," says Dr. Wansink in his book, *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think*. We overeat, according to Wansink, because of such influences as family, friends, packaging, plates, labeling, shapes, distances and containers.

Wansink's studies suggest we can eat 20 percent more or 20 percent less without being aware of it. Becoming more "mindful" about even one eating practice can be significant. Daily eating 100 calories more than needed can result in a weight gain of 10 pounds a year!

Take this short 6-question quiz and see if you can guess the results of some of Wansink's research studies.

Question 1: How much more soup did people eat when their soup bowl kept filling up without their knowledge?

- A. 13 %
- B. 53%
- C. 73%

Answer 1: C. Dr. Wansink rigged up half the soup bowls on a table with hidden hoses attached to them through a hole in the bowl. As people ate the soup, the hoses kept filling the bowls with more soup. After the study, the people with the bottomless soup bowls estimated they ate the same amount as the people eating from the regular bowls. In reality, they ate an average of 73 percent (and 113 calories!) more.

It's important to see the total amount you're eating. It's easy to overeat when we keep reaching into a bag or container and never see how much we're really putting into our mouths. As people did with the soup bowl that kept filling, we're likely to keep eating more than we realize if we keep dipping into a bag. If you're planning to eat some chips, remove the amount you plan to eat from the bag BEFORE you start eating.

Question 2: When two glasses had the same capacity, into which glass did people pour the most liquid?

- A. Short, wide glass
- B. Tall, narrow glass

Answer 2: A. Wansink's studies showed people drank an average of 25 to 30 percent more from short, wide tumblers than from tall, skinny glasses. The same amount of juice in a tall, skinny glass looks as if the glass is fuller than it does in the short, wide glass.

Question 3: How did the size of plate or bowl influence people's perception of amount when they were offered the same portion size?

- A. Size of plate or bowl made no difference in the amount they thought they ate.
- B. People thought they ate more when they were served on a large plate or bowl.
- C. People thought they ate more when they were served on a small plate or bowl.

Answer 3: C. Wansink found people perceived they ate more when eating from a smaller bowl or plate. As the size of the dish increased, the size of their servings tended to increase. The larger dish made servings look smaller by comparison, resulting in people helping themselves to more food. For example, people ate an average of 31 percent more ice cream (equal to 137 more calories!) when they scooped ice cream into a 34-ounce bowl vs. a 17-ounce bowl.

Changing your "tablescape," such as the shape of glasses and size of your plates, etc. may be enough to help you significantly reduce your calorie intake. About 72 percent of our calories come from food we eat from bowls, plates, and glasses, according to Wansink's research.

Container and package size also made a difference, regardless of how the food tasted. In another study, research subjects were fed 5-day-old stale popcorn at the movies in three sizes of containers: "medium," "large" and "bigger-than-your-head" buckets. Even though the popcorn didn't taste that great, the biggest bucket people ate an average of 173 more calories of popcorn than those eating from smaller containers.

Question 4: How did the number of chocolates people ate from covered, desktop candy dishes compare when the dishes were clear vs. when the dishes were white?

- A. They ate the same amount from both dishes.
- B. They ate more from the white dish.
- C. They ate more from the clear dish.

Answer 4: C. Staff with clear desktop dishes ate 71 percent more (7.7 vs. 4.6 candies) than staff that ate candies from white dishes. This equaled an average difference of 77 calories per day. That could lead to over five pounds of extra weight in a year.

We tend to eat more of visible foods because we think about them every time we see them. Eventually, our resistance is likely to weaken.

Question 5: At which location did people eat the most candy from a clear, lidded candy dish?

- A. Corner of desk
- B. Top left-hand desk drawer
- C. On a file cabinet six feet from the desk
- D. They ate the same amount from all locations.

Answer 5: A. People tended to eat the most when it was more convenient. They ate an average of nine candies -- or about 225 extra calories daily -- when the candy dish was on their desk, compared to six candies when in the desk drawer and only four candies when they had to walk six feet.

In talking with people after the experiment, the researchers noticed something else. When people had to walk a distance for a piece of candy, they had more time to think twice and talk themselves out of it. So, if you have a food you'd like to eat less of, make it less convenient to eat. Move it to a harder-to-reach cupboard shelf, store it in the basement, serve it from a buffet table vs. the dining table, etc. Or, just don't bring it into the house.

Question 6: What percent of what we eat is determined by “nutritional gatekeepers” (grocery shopper & food preparer)?

- A. 26%
- B. 61%
- C. 72%

Answer 6: C. Through eating more mindfully, whoever in your household is the “nutritional gatekeeper” can influence his or her food intake as well as that of everyone else as much as 72 percent.

Make less healthy foods inconvenient to eat. Promote reasonable portion sizes through the size and shape of dinnerware. Encourage people to measure out and see the total amount they're eating rather than eating directly from a container.