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Health

## 7 clever ways to outsmart your stomach

From taking a breath to turning off the TV, how to fill your gut — and lose it

# By David Schipper MensHealth

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Recently, Cornell University researchers asked a group of people a simple question: "How do you know when you're through eating dinner?"

The answer might seem obvious. After all, doesn't everyone push the plate away when they feel full? Well, no. The leanest people do, according to the scientists, but people who are overweight rely more on what are known as "external cues." For example, guys packing a few extra pounds tend to stop eating when ...

Their plates are clean.

Story continues below ↓



Everyone else in their group is finished.

The TV show they're watching is over.

Unfortunately, these cues have nothing to do with how they feel physically. "People's brains are often out of touch with their bodies," says C. Peter Herman, Ph.D., a University of Toronto expert on appetite control. "And when eating becomes mindless, overeating becomes routine."

The key player in all of this appears to be a region of your brain called the left posterior amygdala, or LPA. This area monitors the volume of food in your stomach during a meal. Fill your gut to a comfortable level, and the LPA tells your brain to drop the fork. Trouble is, it delivers that information at dial-up speed in a DSL world. "Many



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#### Feel full longer

Silence a growling stomach with these satisfying options, courtesy of Men's Health nutrition advisor Jonny Bowden, Ph.D. Each offers a hunger-fighting dose of protein, along with fiber or fat, to help keep you full for hours after you've eaten.

By Alison Granell

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men consume calories faster than their bodies can say, 'Stop!' " explains Herman. "So they look to external cues to guide their consumption."

The bottom line is this: To shrink your gut, you need to start listening to it. We've scoured the science and tapped the top experts to help you learn how to do just that. Use these seven simple strategies, and you'll fill up without filling out.

#### Sit down to snack

Turns out, the trappings of a formal meal make you think you're eating more than you actually are — and that may boost satiety levels. A 2006 Canadian study found that when people ate lunch while sitting at a set table, they consumed a third less at a later snack than those who ate their midday meals while standing at a counter. Think of it as the Zen of eating: "If you treat every dining experience with greater respect, you'll be less likely to use your fork as a shovel," says sports nutritionist and behavioral psychotherapist Lisa Dorfman, M.S., R.D. "And that includes snacks as well as your three squares."

#### Turn off the tube

University of Massachusetts researchers found that people who watched TV during a meal consumed 288 more calories on average than those who didn't. The reason: What you're seeing on television distracts you, which keeps your brain from recognizing that you're full.

#### Slow down and savor

"Pay close attention to those first three bites, which people usually wolf down due to excitement," says Jeffrey Greeson, Ph.D., a health psychologist at Duke Integrative Medicine. In fact, mimic a food critic: "Examine the food's texture, savor the flavors in your mouth, and then pay attention and feel the swallow," he says. "Psychologically, this form of meditative eating boosts satiety and promotes a sense of satisfaction for the entire meal." While you're at it, try spicing up relatively bland fare, such as scrambled eggs, with hot sauce or smoked paprika. "Hot, flavorful foods help trigger your brain to realize you're eating," says Dorfman.

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### Take a bite, take a breath

University of Rhode Island researchers discovered that consciously slowing down between bites decreases a person's calorie intake by 10 percent. "Breathing helps you gauge how hungry you are, since it directs your mind toward your body," says Greeson. "It's also quite practical, since you can do it throughout a meal and not draw attention to yourself in a social situation."

## Don't share your food

Researchers at the State University of New York at Buffalo observed that men who ate with a group of buddies downed 60 percent more calories than when they ate with a spouse or girlfriend. That's because people often match their intake of food to that of their dining partners. Of course, you shouldn't have to sit home on guys' night out. Choose one reasonable entrée for yourself, and skip the communal foods —

bread, nachos, wings and pizza, for example — which encourage you to take your eating cues from pals.

#### Keep a food journal

It's an effective way to remind yourself how much you're eating over the course of a day. But it doesn't need to be complicated: University of Pittsburgh scientists found that dieters who simply wrote down the size of each meal (S, M, L, XL) were just as successful at losing weight as those who tracked specific foods and caloric counts. One useful addition: Detail the motivation behind your eating habits. "Were you really hungry or just blowing off steam before bedtime? Recognizing that you weren't feeling true hunger reinforces the idea of listening to your body," says Dorfman.

#### Don't trust the 'healthy' menu

You're likely to underestimate your meal's calorie count by about 35 percent, according to a new study published in the Journal of Consumer Research. The best approach is to check the restaurant's <a href="https://nutrition.org/research/">nutrition</a> guide before you order. A University of Mississippi study found that people consumed 54 percent fewer calories when they used this simple strategy.

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