Eating
Amnesia

The devil's food cake is in the **details:** For many women, **losing weight** starts with recognizing how much they **unconsciously** eat.

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Celebrity scandals, credit card numbers, and the name of that idiot who screwed us over in college—these are the things we recall with ease. But when it comes to the calories we put in our mouths, the facts start to get a little fuzzier. Sure, we remember the meals where we managed to be virtuous, but a few tiny hors d'oeuvres, a bite (or six) of our boyfriend's mac and cheese, a salty snack in a trance in front of the TV? Those details have a funny habit of slipping our mind. "People say they can't really understand why they're gaining weight, because they don't eat anything," says Lisa Young, adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University and author of *The Portion Teller* (Crown). "But everybody underestimates how much they really eat, and they often forget the extras."

Add to that the fact that many of us just aren't paying attention. In a 2011 study published in *Appetite*, researchers fed 29 women identical meals for lunch, and asked one group to focus on the taste of their food while eating, another group to read a newspaper article about food, and the third to do no extra tasks. When offered cookies later in the day, participants who had focused on their food during lunch ate significantly fewer. "Taking time to appreciate food could help with appetite control," says study coauthor Suzanne Higgs of the University of Birmingham in England. Paying more mind to what goes in your mouth can help you lose weight—and keep it a distant memory.

1

Food is just as fattening when it's organic.

And vegan. And gluten-free. "A lot of healthy foods are not optimal for weight loss unless they're eaten in small amounts," says New York City weight-loss expert Stephen P. Gullo. "In fact, my heaviest patients are vegetarians— because they're eating things like whole-grain pasta and hummus." As recent studies have shown, it's easy to go overboard if we think something is good for us. "The more something is perceived as healthy, the more likely you are to underestimate the number of calories in it," says Brian Wansink, director of the Cornell University Food and Brand Lab and author of *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* (Bantam). "In studies, people tend to eat 25 to 40 percent more of foods that are labeled 'low-fat.' They think of low-fat as a get-out-of-jail-free card."

2

Liquid calories add up.

That's because they don't make a dent in your appetite. In a Pennsylvania State University study, women were asked to drink either diet cola, regular cola, orange juice, 1 percent milk, or water during lunch. Researchers found that the women consumed the same amount of food regardless of the beverage—*meaning caloric drinks tacked on calories without making subjects feel any fuller. "Calories from some kinds of drinks creep past calorie regulatory systems pretty much unnoticed," says Barbara Rolls, professor of nutritional sciences at Penn State and one of the study authors.*

3

Salads aren't necessarily health food.

A bed of lettuce isn't a magic wand that turns anything low-calorie. "Salads are a big source of hidden calories for most people," says Gullo. Load up your romaine with a blanket of cheese, chicken, avocado, Craisins, walnuts, croutons, and dressing, and you might as well have ordered a burger. "Pick only one protein for your salad—eggs or cheese or salmon," says Young. Dried fruits and nuts should be limited to no more than one type per salad, says Lauren Slayton, a nutritionist in New York City and founder of foodtrainers.net. And watch out for the roasted vegetables. "If they look shiny, they're likely marinated in oil," says Young. For dressing, go with olive oil and lemon or a regular vinaigrette; low-fat and no-fat varieties can be loaded with sugar. But whatever you order, ask for it on the side. Says Young: "Olive oil has 120 calories a tablespoon, but if you order salad in a restaurant, you could be getting four times that much dressing."

4

Eating meals or snacks in front of the TV or computer is a fast track to fat.

Distraction isn't the only problem that comes with eating in front of a screen— the habit itself can get you in trouble. In a 2011 study in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* researchers gave moviegoers popcorn that was either fresh or very stale. Those who didn't usually eat popcorn at the movies ate much less stale popcorn, but those who habitually had movie popcorn ate equal amounts of stale and fresh. "Once someone has repeatedly eaten a food in a particular environment, their brain comes to associate the food with the environment," says David Neal, one of the study authors. "Your brain links environments like the couch with food. This can be disrupted with behavioral changes such as switching the hand you're holding the spoon with, or by planning in advance to only purchase smaller serving sizes."

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You do not have your boyfriend's metabolism.

Girl meets boy. Girl eats like boy. Girl's pants won't zip. "Men can burn significantly more calories and carbohydrates than women," says Gullo. "Love may be good for the heart, but it's not always good for the waistline." To keep relationship weight gain to a minimum, avoid planning dates solely around eating out (if you cook the romantic dinner yourself, you control what's in it), remind yourself to take at least a few nights a week to eat like a girl, and never match him cookie for cookie.

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> "I see mothers who subsist on salads and fish, but then there's a pizza crust or two bites of ice cream," says Slayton. "This can add 300 calories a day."

7
The kitchen counts.

Your biggest saboteur might just be your soapstone counters. "I call the kitchen 'the fat room,' because people tend to nibble on whatever they leave out," says Gullo, who suggests keeping snacks out of sight and staying away from the kitchen when chatting on the phone—prime time for mindless eating. Cooking—and constant sampling—is another danger. After all, there's a reason more chefs look like Mario Batali than Giada De Laurentiis: Snacking while you prepare dinner can tack on "over 300 calories before you sit down at the table," says Slayton. To avoid grazing, don't cook on an empty stomach, limit any tasting to a demitasse spoon—not a serving spoon—and chew gum while you work, says Gullo.

6
Cocktails pack a huge calorie punch.

With their ginger-lychee syrups and sugared rims, trendy mixologist cocktails can "easily have 500 calories," says Young. "People look me in the eye and say, 'I don't count alcohol calories,'" says Slayton. "Really? The scale does." When you're in a bar, skip anything made with juice, syrup, or sugar, and instead go for wine, spritzers, or martinis. Gullo also suggests alternating each alcoholic drink with mineral water. And consider going with bottled water—not tap. "When people pay five bucks for a bottle of mineral water, they're going to drink it," he says. Keep in mind that skipping a meal in order to drink is not the answer. "If you drink on an empty stomach, it will send your appetite into the trigger zone, and you're going to eat more," says Gullo. "So if the drink leads you to eat the chips and guacamole, it may be costing you 1,000 calories."
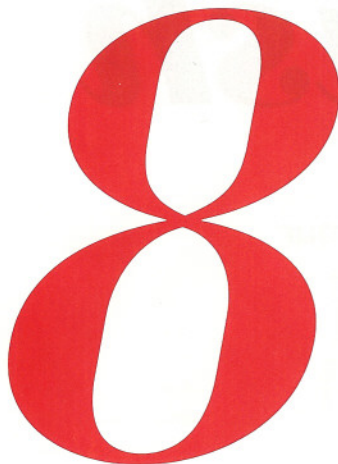
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Restaurant food tastes good for a reason.

Dry-grilled chicken breasts won't earn anyone a Michelin star. "Putting more oil and butter on food just tastes better," says Louis Aronne, director of the Comprehensive Weight Control Program at the New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, who once witnessed a chef top a single piece of fish with an entire stick of butter before popping it into the oven. Vegetables are often doused in butter or oil, which may add 10 to 20 grams of fat, says Gullo.

The other problem with restaurants is that you're rarely eating at a table for one. "Studies show that when you eat with one other person, you eat 35 percent more, but if you're with seven other people, you end up eating 96 percent more," says Wansink. "Not only are you distracted talking to them, but if they order an appetizer, you do, too. If someone wants to split dessert, you say yes." The solution isn't to become a shut-in. Order food steamed or poached, says Gullo, who also suggests asking for steamed vegetables (especially at Chinese restaurants) cooked with garlic, scallion, and ginger. And when you do go out with friends, choose your seat wisely. "Don't sit next to someone who is a food pusher or who loves to share her French fries," says Gullo.