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### The Table Landscape

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An exotic name increases the consumption of a food.



## The Table Landscape

The smaller the package, the less you will eat.

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

In his book, *Mindless Eating*, Brian Wansink explains why Americans eat more than they think they do. People believe that how much they eat is determined by how hungry they are, how much they like the food, and what mood they are in. But Brian shows how the environment largely determines food intake.

We experience a variety of signals and cues that tell us when to eat, and how much. Accessibility, the size of the package or plate, words on a label, the shape of the cup, the lighting in a room, the presence of friends, and variety are all important factors. Food or beverage in a restaurant given a very classy or exotic name will greatly increase its consumption.

The bigger the package, the more we consume. People watching a movie ate more than 50 percent more popcorn from a large container compared to those given a medium-sized container. The shape of our glasses also determine how much we drink. People given a short, wide glass poured an average of 19 percent more juice or soft drink than those offered a tall, thin glass.

Big dishes and big spoons spell big trouble. People given a 34-ounce bowl and a 3-ounce scoop served themselves almost 60 percent more ice cream than those given a 17-ounce bowl and a 2-ounce scoop. Students invited to a party could serve themselves Chex Mix in Room A from two huge gallon bowls, or in Room B from four half-gallon bowls. Those in Room A ate 59 percent more food.

Increasing the variety of food also increases how much someone eats. People offered three different flavors of yogurt consumed about 25 percent more yogurt than if offered only one flavor. At a party, people ate 18 percent



more food when the food was served in 12 bowls, compared to the same food being served in three bowls. People watching a video ate 77 percent more M&M's when the bowl contained M&M's of ten colors compared to those eating from a bowl containing only seven colors of M&M's.

On average, people eat about 15 percent less food when food is placed on their plate before they start eating a meal, compared to when smaller amounts are taken, and they go back for seconds and place additional food on their plate as they eat.

The more hassle it is to eat, the less you will eat. Secretaries ate nine chocolates a day if they were placed in a dish next to them, while they ate only four a day if they were placed six feet away. People choose finger foods more readily if they don't have to shell or peel the food.

We often lose track of how much we are eating when we eat with family and friends. On average, we eat 35 percent more when we eat with another person, and twice as much if we eat with seven or more persons. The amount of pizza you eat is influenced by how much your friends are eating.

Instead of mindless eating, we should make intentional healthy choices and limit the influence of the table landscape.

Winston Craig, Ph.D., RD, is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.