

# Addressing Triggers and Habits for Weight Management

Recognising and managing eating triggers and habits is one of the most effective ways to support weight loss. Many food choices are automatic responses to stress, boredom, routine, or time of day.

Once you notice the trigger – situations, emotions, and environments – that lead to unplanned or less healthy eating, you can practise a different response and build healthier habits.



## How to Identify Eating Triggers and Habits

Start by building awareness of what, when, why, and how you eat. Understanding your patterns helps you take control and make healthier choices.

Common triggers include:

- **Emotional:** eating in response to stress, boredom, or anxiety. Step Change in Safety's Weight Loss Roadmap includes information on emotional eating.
- **Environmental:** snacks that are visible and easy to access at home or work
- **Situational:** eating while watching TV, travelling, or working late
- **Social:** eating or drinking because others are (often at gatherings and celebrations)
- **Time-based:** snacking at the same time each day out of habit rather than hunger



## Track What you Eat and Drink

A great starting point is a short food and drink diary. Track 4–5 days and record:

- What you ate/drank (and portion size)
- Time of day
- Hunger level (try grading it on a scale 1–10)
- Where you ate (home, work, on the go)
- Mood (how you were feeling)

You'll soon spot patterns such as snacking, skipped meals, or comfort/boredom eating. Once you can see them, it's easier to interrupt them.



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## Break the Routine

Eating habits often follow daily routines, so we eat at the same times and in the same places in response to the same cues (breaks, commuting, finishing work, boredom, stress). Over time, unhealthy habits like skipping meals, snacking, or overeating can become automatic.

To break the routine, make small, consistent changes: keep regular mealtimes, prepare healthier options in advance, and plan for high-risk times (for example, late afternoons or evenings).

Add simple healthy alternatives to reduce “food noise”, such as a short walk, a drink of water, exercise, or a quick chat. These can reduce cravings and weaken the link between a trigger and eating.

Also pause and ask why you’re eating. Many people eat for reasons other than hunger, such as stress, emotions, boredom, or convenience.

To increase awareness, ask yourself:

- Am I hungry, or is this habit?
- Is this planned or impulsive?
- How do I feel, and what’s happening around me?



## Prepare & Plan

Make your environment work for you. Many eating behaviours are automatic responses to what’s available and convenient. Keep healthier options easy to reach and limit access to high-calorie snacks to reduce impulsive choices.

Plan what you’ll eat and buy healthier snacks in advance so you’re not deciding when you’re tired or busy.



## Nobody’s Perfect

Aim for gradual, sustainable change, not perfection. Trying to change everything at once is hard to maintain. If you try to change everything at once, you’ll find it very difficult to maintain. Instead, choose one or two behaviours to focus on (for example, reducing snacking, being more active, or keeping regular mealtimes).

Small, consistent changes are more likely to stick and support long-term weight management.

