

THE BEHAVIOR CHAIN

Eating is a behavior that is seldom done in isolation. Rather, it's the last link in a chain of events that could lead to overeating. To stop its progression, you need to break the links of the behavior chain.

Behavior Chain Example

Follow the links of the behavior chain that led John to overeat.

John was doing great on his weight loss program until the day he devoured an entire bag of nacho chips in one sitting. The first link occurred when John opened the conference room door to see the spread being prepared for the office party. He had adjusted his meal plan to be able to enjoy some of his favorite foods at the party yet still stick to his eating plan. His mouth watered in anticipation of the food and fun that awaited him. That added a second link to the chain. Suddenly his boss told him the deadline for an important project just got moved up and he needed John's immediate assistance in putting a report together. John figured he would not be able to attend the party and that made him feel disappointed. Another link was put in place. By the day's end, the report was completed, but John's anger at missing out on the fun lingered. The behavior chain lengthened.

On his way home, John stopped at the deli to get a sandwich for dinner. He spotted a large bag of nacho chips, one of his favorite snacks, and thought, "I missed out on the party because of this deadline, and now I deserve to treat myself for what I did at work today." John bought the sandwich, as well as the bag of chips. Then, he felt so guilty about letting his anger "make" him buy the chips that he decided to eat the whole bag.

Breaking the Chain

Where could John have broken the chain that led to his eating the entire bag of chips?

- He could have walked past the conference room door instead of looking inside before the party.
- He could have allowed himself 10 minutes to go to the party, chat with his friends, and take a small amount of the food he wanted. Feeling satisfied that he made an appearance at the party and being able to sample some food, he could have focused immediately on his work without feeling angry.
- At the deli, John could have bought the deli sandwich without the big bag of chips. If he had stopped by the party, he might not have felt like he deserved a treat at the deli.
- Or, instead of buying the chips, he could have chosen a snack that better fit his weight loss program, like an individual-sized bag of pretzels or lite popcorn.
- Instead of feeling guilty about buying, and therefore, eating, the whole bag of chips, John could have allowed himself to enjoy a single serving of his chosen snack.
- When events or emotions tempt you to eat, it helps to have a plan of action in place. Here are some ways to prevent common eating triggers from leading to undesirable eating behaviors.

