



Create Safe Zones in Your Food World

You have created your personal food plan and are committed to eating foods that nourish your body and mind. Now, set yourself up for success by surrounding yourself with delicious food that fits your plan. Learn how to create safe zones throughout your food world so you are not constantly being tempted by foods that are not part of your plan. Plan for your weaknesses, find allies to support you and, most importantly, have compassion for yourself when you slip up. When you plan ahead and transform your environment into safe food zones, you will find it easy to stay true to your food plan and you will be well on your way to a brighter, more energized, healthier you.

What is A Safe Zone?

A safe zone is a place in which you have control over your food environment. In a safe zone, you have food options that fit within your personal food plan so you can stay on track. Safe zones make it easy to abide by your food plan and set you up for success.

Your home kitchen is your main safe zone—you control what you bring into your kitchen, you control the menu and you know exactly what you put into everything you cook.

Safe Zones Outside of Your Home

If you could always stay within the safe zone of your home, you would never stray from your personal food plan—but you can't live entirely in your kitchen. The success of your food plan depends on how successful you are at creating safe zones outside of your home. Out in the world, you will routinely encounter unsafe zones that you have the power to transform into safe zones. Follow these tips for creating safe zones in the most common environments you encounter.

The Office

Many of us spend the majority of our time away from home. By bringing your lunch from home every day, you are extending the safe zone of your home kitchen to your office. Business meetings are more challenging, as coworkers may bring snacks that do not fit within your plan. And that candy bowl on your coworker's desk may be hard to pass up. Set yourself up for success by planning ahead.

Bring your lunch to work so you can stay on plan and avoid restaurants and fast food. You'll save money, too.

Bring your own snacks to business meetings, so you know you have something to eat while others are downing their doughnuts.

Create Safe Zones

1. Identify unsafe zones
2. Plan to bring healthy choices for unsafe zones
3. Bring your lunch
4. Find allies to support you
5. Know your weaknesses
6. Forgive yourself for slip-ups

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Identify allies within your office space. You may have coworkers who also prefer healthier options. Team up with them to promote healthy snacks—or at least some healthier options—at meetings and around the office.

Encourage your manager to provide healthier snacks and eliminate the unhealthy ones. A reminder that nourishing snacks increase worker productivity may go a long way in convincing your manager to forgo the cookies and opt for healthier options.

Eating Out

Restaurant food tastes good for a reason—many restaurants lure you in with foods that are stunningly high in fat, salt and sugar. We all love to go out to eat—the convenience of being served a meal with no prep time and no dishes to do is a real treat. Follow these tips to help create a safe zone in your favorite restaurants.

- View the menu online ahead of time, when you are not hungry. Choose items that appeal to you and fall within your plan.
- Ask questions about how the food is prepared and don't be afraid to make specific requests. For example, you may ask that your food be cooked in olive oil, or that your veggies be steamed instead of fried.

- Skip the bread basket at the beginning of the meal. Save your appetite for the main course.
- Share an entrée or ask for half of your entrée in a doggie bag ahead of time. You will not miss that extra half, as restaurant portions are usually enormous. And, you will save money by ordering once and eating twice.
- Choose restaurants that serve nourishing foods. You will find more on their menus that fit your plan.

Business Travel

Travel challenges you to stay on course with your food plan, as unexpected delays lead to skipped meals and a higher likelihood of poor food choices. Likewise, conferences can be tricky, as you are often served food that you have little control over. Again, planning ahead will set you up for success.

- Bring an emergency stash of snacks from home in case your travel gets delayed. This way, you'll never find yourself famished and prone to making poor food choices.
- Stock up on healthy snacks at the local grocery store upon arriving to your destination. Always keep fruits and veggies on hand in case you are served a meal that doesn't fit your plan.
- Visit the local salad bar instead of ordering a pizza to eat in your hotel room.
- Skip the desserts. Desserts may be served at every meal at a conference. They are usually loaded with unhealthy ingredients and are not very tasty anyway. Save your indulgences for when it's truly worth it.

Vacations and Car Travel

Create a car travel safe zone by packing a cooler with nutritious snacks and lunches. This will help you avoid buying candy, chips and soda pop when you stop to refuel your car. Fresh fruit, low-sugar yogurt, individual portions of nuts, carrot and celery sticks with hummus or guacamole are great choices. Also, packing a picnic lunch is both a nutritious and budget-friendly option.

Parties and Potlucks

While parties and potlucks are wonderful opportunities to connect with friends and celebrate, they are inherently unsafe food zones.

These few strategies will help you create pockets of safe zones in these indulgent environments.

- Always bring a delicious dish that fits within your plan. This ensures you will have something nourishing to eat. And one of your friends may love the dish so much that they bring it next time—then you will have two ‘safe’ dishes at your next gathering.
- Use a small plate. Research shows that the smaller the plate you use, the less you will eat.
- Stand away from the buffet table to avoid mindless snacking.
- Take only one taste of the dishes that interest you. You can always go back for more if something is particularly yummy.
- Don't go to a party with an empty stomach. When you are overly hungry, you are more likely to make poor food choices and overeat.
- Drink water. It hydrates you and makes you feel full.

Holidays

The holidays present added challenges beyond the potlucks and parties at other times of the year. Holidays are steeped in tradition, and family members may resist substitutions of dishes they have grown to expect. You may find it hard to imagine Thanksgiving without Aunt Marge's candied



sweet potatoes with roasted marshmallows, which you have looked forward to since you were a toddler. Here are some tips for making holidays a bit friendlier to your waistline.

- Introduce healthier versions of traditional dishes. Experiment with some of Chef Marshall's holiday-friendly recipes. They are so delicious that you and your family will forget that they are ‘healthier’ alternatives.
- Eat slowly so you know when you are full. Put your fork down between bites and really savor your food. When you eat mindfully, you will enjoy your food more and will be satisfied with less. You are there for the fellowship, so have some conversation between bites.
- Plan to indulge a bit during the holidays. If you eat and drink carefully before and after events and keep track of your indulgences, you can stay within your overall food plan. This way, you won't feel guilty about an extra treat or feel like you've blown it.
- Only indulge in items that are worth it. Don't waste calories on store-bought, pre-packaged appetizers or baked goods made from inferior ingredients. They don't taste very good anyway. When you decide to indulge, go for the special, home-baked items that will thoroughly satisfy you.

Other Circumstances

What other situations do you regularly encounter that involve unsafe food zones? Consider your daily rhythms and identify other common unsafe zones in your life. You will be more successful at navigating these situations without straying from your plan when you strategize ahead of time.

Know Your Weaknesses

Food Triggers

We all have some foods to which we have a hard time saying “no.” Identify these foods and determine whether you can eat them in moderation or if you must abstain altogether. If you can limit your portion size, plan to indulge a bit occasionally. But if you know you can't eat just one cookie or handful of chips, avoid them entirely. Simply identifying and acknowledging these trigger foods deflates some of their power over you.



Time and Situational Triggers

Certain times of the day or situations may consistently pose a challenge for you. For many people, the afternoon is notorious for craving sweets and needing a pick-me-up. Keep in mind that cravings only last about 15 minutes, so plan for this by having healthy snacks on hand or scheduling a quick walk to distract yourself.

Find Allies

Friends and family members who are aware of your plan are your best supporters and can help you succeed. If a friend is throwing a party, offer ahead of time to bring some irresistible recipes that fit your plan. Team up with office mates to bring healthier food to office meetings. Coordinate with friends to transform a potluck into a feast of nourishing foods. Surround yourself with individuals who have the same commitment to nourishing eating that you do and you will all help each other succeed.

Plan Your Days in Advance

Over the weekend, look at your schedule for the coming week and identify situations that may involve unsafe food zones. Refer to our tips for ideas on how to create safe zones

in these situations. You set yourself up for success when you are not taken by surprise by an unsafe zone.

When You Find Yourself in an Unsafe Zone

It is inevitable that at some point you will find yourself hungry in an unsafe zone. Don't panic. With a few tips, you will be able to navigate unexpected unsafe zones without veering off your plan.

- Snack on your emergency fruit and vegetable stash. Hopefully you've made it a habit to always have a healthy snack on hand. Now is the time to use it! It may not satisfy you completely, but it will take the edge off your hunger so you don't overindulge.
- Scan all of the foods available and decide on your best options before choosing anything.
- Use a small plate. The smaller the plate, the less you will eat.
- Drink a lot of water. The water will help you temporarily feel full, so you are likely to eat less. You can get the nutrition you need once you are back in a safe zone.
- If you cannot indulge in moderation, then abstain. You may not be able to "eat just one" when faced with an array of treats. If so, avoid them completely.
- Have compassion for yourself. Finding yourself hungry in an unsafe zone is a recipe for making less than ideal food choices. Forgive yourself if you slip up and renew your efforts the next day by making smart food choices when you are back in your safe zone. Add this unsafe zone to your list and develop a plan for the next time.
- Remember, you only fail if you quit.

Conclusion

Your personal nutrition plan will be easy to follow when you surround yourself with delicious safe zones, so create safe zones throughout your food world, anticipate and plan for the unsafe zones you may encounter and have compassion for yourself when you slip up.

When you follow your nutrition plan, you will feel healthy, vibrant, energized and have less pain. You will also feel proud and motivated to know that you are treating your body well and supporting your best self.

You will love the way you feel!