

# Nutrition Barriers



I was recently asked how I deal with nutrition clients who struggle to stick with eating well. I have some ideas about solutions that I've seen work for me personally, as well as with my clients, but I wanted to get a broader perspective so I posted the question on Girls Gone Strong. Within an hour, there were 131 comments posted.

Holy hot topic, Batman! After combing through the answers, 10 very popular themes emerged which I will discuss below. Let me preface this by saying that I am not a psychologist, therapist, or counselor, and if you have major issues with food, seeking professional help is a good idea. I am simply discussing tactics that I've seen work with myself and my clientele.

# Lack of Willpower

This is probably one of the most common barriers I see, but it's the one we are least willing to recognize. Many of us make dozens of other excuses about why we cannot reach our goals, when it truly boils down to willpower.

This is not passing judgment by any means. There are certain areas of my life where I lack willpower much more than others. For example, getting to sleep on time. I can make excuse after excuse about why I can't get to bed before midnight, but if I am being honest with myself, it's because I'm not sure I \*really\* want to.

In fact, I had to hire a Life Coach/Accountability Partner to force me to get in bed on time!

**Solution:** First you must decide if the lifestyle change of eating well is truly important to you. If it is, make it a priority. If it's not, that's OK because it's your decision, but call a spade a spade. Don't BS yourself into pretending it's important because you're embarrassed to say that it's not.

In my experience, there are two ways to look at willpower. The first is that it's like a muscle, and the more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes. I've experienced this in my own life. I used to eat fast food four times a day and could never picture going a day or two without it. That sounded like torture. Finally, I

decided to make the decision to take care of myself, and over time, resisting delicious foods has gotten significantly easier. I've also strengthened my willpower in other areas including time management, financial decisions, interpersonal interactions, etc.

The other way to view willpower is that it's finite. You can only use so much of it before it runs out. Everyone will have a different willpower reserve, but once it runs out, you will struggle. I've experienced this as well. For

example, if you're trying to be really strict with your nutrition and you're exerting a lot of willpower in that area, next time you go shopping, you might be so exhausted by the amount of willpower you're exerting and feel so restricted that you say, "Screw it!" and blow your budget because you struggle to exert willpower in that area.



In my experience, both hold true depending on the person. It's absolutely possible to increase the amount of willpower you can exert at any given time, and it's also possible to exert so much willpower that you exhaust that resource.

Try and identify your tendencies and adjust accordingly. If you can increase your willpower, do it by exerting it more often. If you know that you struggle when your willpower is being exerted in too many areas, identify which are most important and delegate accordingly.



# Cravings

**L**ack of willpower and cravings seem to go hand in hand, although to me willpower seems to be psychological and cravings are more physiological. We have all felt that, “I absolutely have to have <insert yummy food here> right now!”

What makes cravings so frustrating is that you feel like you need what you’re craving. I would imagine the hardwiring for cravings is a protective mechanism to make sure our bodies are getting the nutrition they need.

For example, craving chocolate can actually be a sign of magnesium deficiency, and craving salty foods can be a sign of a chloride deficiency. Your body is craving foods because it could be lacking specific nutrients. Of course, some cravings might just be caused by the blood sugar roller coaster you’re riding from eating a ton of junk food, but either way, cravings are no fun.

**S**olution: Pay attention to your cravings. Do they come when you’re stressed? Then read the solutions found in barrier #6 – emotional eating. Do they come when you’re surrounded by temptation? Then read the solutions food in barriers # 1 and # 3 – willpower and social situations. If you’re cravings occur within a few hours of eating a really

high carb meal, it’s likely a blood sugar crash, and you need to start eating more balanced meals of protein, vegetables, and fat to prevent those spikes and crashes.

However, if they simply come about for no apparent reason, do your research and figure out what your cravings mean, what you might be deficient in, and eat foods recommended to help with that deficiency.



# Social Situations

**F**or thousands of years, consuming delicious (and often unhealthy) food has been a ritual humans have taken part in to help celebrate special occasions. Think about it: weddings and birthdays both have cake-cutting ceremonies, we have potlucks and grill out to celebrate the Fourth of July or a graduation ceremony, and the entire purpose of Thanksgiving is to gather for a feast. Eating and celebrating go hand in hand.

Those who struggle with eating well in social situations are often faced with a big dilemma: do I go to this social event and potentially sabotage my progress? Or do I skip the event and save myself the torture of being surrounded by lots of good food?

**Solution:** Lucky for you, there are several, and depending on your personality and tendencies, one of these should work well for you.

**Eat before you go.** It's way easier to turn down food that you shouldn't be eating if you aren't hungry.

**Engage in intermittent fasting.** Yes, this is the exact opposite of the previous solution I suggested, but it works well for some people. Fasting before you go to an event is a very simple way to help control your overall caloric intake for the day. Keep in mind that it's important to identify if this is a good option for you or not. If you're someone who will go hog-wild and cram down 4,000 calories if you go to an event hungry, then you should probably pick option A. If you find that you fill up relatively quickly after you've been fasting, this will probably work well for you.

**Schedule an off-plan indulgence for that event.** Look, I get it. No one wants to consistently feel deprived of delicious foods, and deprived of the experience that comes along with celebrating joyous events with food. It kinda sucks.

That's why I usually have my clients follow an 80/20 or 90/10 rule, meaning that 80 or 90% of the time, they are eating foods that fit their plan, and the other 10-20% of the time they are eating foods that are considered to be off their plan. I generally recommend 80/20 for people who want to maintain their body fat levels and 90/10 for someone who is looking to get leaner.



**Choose your events (and your food) wisely.** This is a biggie. I have a saying:

*“If you're going to choose to indulge, it should be tip-the-cup-upside-down-delicious.”*

This means that if you're going to eat something sugary or extremely calorie dense, it should be worth it. For example, your Grandmother's homemade peanut butter fudge?

Totally worth it. The dry fruitcake your neighbor brought to your holiday party? Umm, no thanks. Save your indulgences for things that are you are really going to enjoy, and savor every bite guilt-free.

This rule also applies to the events you choose to attend. Don't feel obligated to attend every event you're invited to. Choose the one you actually want to go to, skip the ones you don't, and keep temptation to a minimum.

# Traveling

**C**onstant travel is a common impediment to eating well on a regular basis. Whether you simply spend all day in your car, or you spend every night in a different city, not having regular access to a fridge and a stove or microwave throughout the day can make things tough. But notice I said tough, not impossible. It just requires a little planning and effort on your part.

**S**olution: Lucky for you, there are several options:

**Pack food with you.** While not always the most convenient option, this definitely ensures that you have control over what you're eating. If you're not the type to lug around a cooler all day, pick more portable foods that don't require refrigeration such as: jerky, cans/pouches of meat and fish like tuna, sardines, and salmon, protein powder, protein bars, nuts, nut butters, apples, bananas, avocados, coconut oil, homemade trail mix, carrots, grape tomatoes, and celery. This is

not an exhaustive list, but should help get you started.

**Scout restaurants before you go.** Almost every restaurant has a meat and vegetable option, so there is no excuse for eating poorly just because you're dining out. And if you are forced to stop at a fast food restaurant, that's still no excuse. Some good fast food options are as follows: a burrito bowl from Chipotle, chili or a bun-less grilled chicken sandwich from Wendy's, chicken Caesar salad (hold the croutons) from McDonald's, or a burger wrapped in lettuce (instead of a bun) from Hard-ee's, Five Guys, or In-n-Out Burger.

**Choose your indulgences wisely.** If you travel often for work, sticking to your plan using the tips above is a good idea. However, if you are going on vacation or another trip for leisure, you should definitely lighten up and enjoy yourself a bit. If you are going to eat something indulgent, make sure that you really enjoy it, take small bites to savor it, and don't let yourself feel guilty. It's vacation for goodness sake!





# Time

**T**ime is a huge barrier for busy professionals and parents alike when it comes to sticking to their nutrition plan. With unhealthy convenience foods on every corner, it's much quicker and easier to run through a drive-through than it is to make a real meal. That being said, if eating well is a priority to you, I'll offer some major time-saving solutions below.

**P**lan ahead. Having a week's worth of meals planned out ahead of time will not only save you time when you go grocery shopping, but you will already know what you are having each night so you're not tempted to grab takeout.

**Cook in bulk.** This is the biggest time saving tool there is when it comes to cooking healthy foods. Pick 2 nights a week, and plan on spending a solid hour or two cooking food for the next 3-4 days. Grill a couple of lbs. of chicken breast, bake several sweet potatoes, roast a few lbs. of vegetables, and make a giant pot of chili. You'll have delicious food for the next

3 days, and throwing together meals will be a cinch.

**Invest in a slow cooker/crock pot.** This will become your best friend. You can spend 5-10 minutes slicing up meat and vegetables and throw them in the slow cooker with a little broth and some spices, set the timer, and your work is done.

**Plan for leftovers.** This works in conjunction with the "cook in bulk" tip listed above, but if you are cooking a single meal, always make extra so you have leftovers for the next few days.



**Have a couple of go-to meals that are quick, easy, and healthy.** Depending on what you or your family like, you should have 2-3 go-to meals that you can make anytime that take less than 15 minutes. Whether it's stir fry, tacos, or this awesome Four Ingredient Indian Fusion, keep a couple of these in the

queue in case you get in a pinch.

# Emotional Eating

**E**motional eating is an extremely common issue, especially among women. We almost all emotional eat on occasion. We might grab a chocolate bar when we feel PMS-y or cry into a pint of ice cream after a bad breakup, and that's not a huge deal. But if you find yourself doing this often, you need to get it under control.

So how do you know if you engage in emotional eating?

A few telltale signs are: eating when you're not hungry, continuing to eat after you feel full, having cravings immediately after feeling stressed, anxious, or upset, or using food as a distraction from your problems.

So how do you stop the emotional eating?

**S**olution: It's a 3-step process.

**Become aware of your eating patterns.** Keep a journal of exactly what you eat for at least a week. When you are about to eat, identify how hungry you are on a scale from 1-10.

If you are between a 6 and a 10, you are genuinely hungry. If you are much less than a 6, then take a moment to identify what's going on in your environment in that moment and how you are feeling. If you notice that you are consistently eating when you're stressed, anxious, or upset, you emotionally eat.

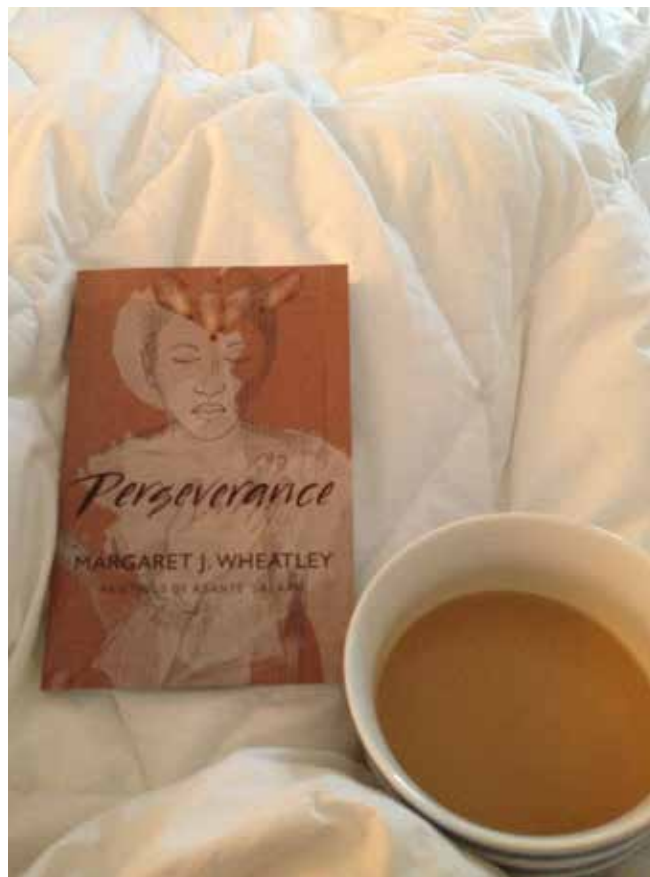
**Find replacement activities.** Make a list of 5-10 activities that you can use to replace your eating when you are feeling emotional and want to eat. These should be things that you can take part in pretty quickly and easily. For example, it doesn't make sense to try and schedule a professional massage every time you feel like emotionally eating. That's an activity where you need quite a bit of notice and time to plan. However, you might be able to give yourself a quick massage by grabbing a lacrosse ball and digging into your upper back, neck, or chest.

Some other good replacement activities include: 10 deep diaphragmatic breaths, drinking a cup of hot tea, looking at funny YouTube videos, going for a brisk 10 minute walk, reading a chapter in whatever book you're reading, or listening to your favorite song.

Regardless, choose something that helps soothe your emotions without food.

**Practice. Practice. Practice.** It's hard to develop new habits, and it won't happen overnight.

You are going to have to consistently replace your emotional eating with one of the new activities from your list for several weeks or more before it becomes habit. That's OK. It's time well spent and before you know it, you won't even consider reaching for a bag of chips or a candy bar when you get stressed, you'll be boiling water for some hot tea while listening to your favorite song.



# Kids

I have to be super honest here, I don't have any children of my own, but I was a nanny for 4 years, so I have a little experience. However, in these instances I like to call on the expertise of Moms who follow a healthy lifestyle like my good friend Sarah Frago of EverydayPaleo.com. She is a trainer, coach, business owner, wife, and mother of 3 who manages to juggle everything while still making time to make sure that she and her family are eating what's best for them.

There are numerous reasons that eating well can be difficult when you have children, however, many of them fall into other categories. It can be hard because you're always busy and rushed (see #5 – time), it can be hard because you're always picking at your kids leftovers (see #1 and #6 – lack of willpower and emotional eating), and it can be hard because feeding a large family healthy food can seem expensive (see #9 – money).

Finally, it can be difficult because children are picky and you probably don't want to be forced to cook different food at each meal (food for you and food that your kids will eat).

Here are some great tips (several are adapted from Sarah's advice) about transitioning kids to healthier eating:

**Start small.** Don't walk in the house one day and announce that you are, "throwing out any unhealthy food and from here on out the whole family will eat only

healthy food." This will scare your children to death and likely cause fits and rebellion. Instead, slowly start integrating some healthy foods that you know they love into their meals and snacks. Slowly stop buying the processed junk food like Twinkies and Doritos, but still offer some other things they might like that aren't as "bad" like strawberries with real whipped cream and all-natural potato chips that have 3 ingredients (potatoes, oil, sea salt).



**Keep it simple.** If your kids start asking questions about where their favorite foods are, your answer should depend on their age. If they are very young, Sarah suggests simply saying, "we don't have that anymore." If they are a bit older, you can explain a little more about eating healthier as a family, but there's no need to make it com-

plicated. If they begin having a meltdown, Sarah likes to try and distract them with something fun and positive like going outside or playing a board game.

**Be consistent.** If you're wishy-washy and give in to bad behavior, your kids will learn that they are rewarded when they throw tantrums. So you can imagine that they will keep throwing tantrums, right? Stick to your guns and they will have to come around. You're the boss, remember? Be patient. This process can take time, but it's totally worth it. Your kids will be healthier, your life will be simpler, and you won't be surrounded with temptation or forced to cook double the meals every week.



# Boredom

If you're complaining that eating well is boring, you either have an incorrect definition of "eating well" or you're not putting any time or effort into what you're choosing to eat. The funny thing is, many of the people that complain of "boredom" when they are trying to eat healthy are the same people who would eat frozen pizza, granola bars, and cereal every day before they tried to transition to better eating!

If this looks "boring" to you, well, umm... I might not be able to help you!

How did this sound? A frittata loaded with veggies and a side of bacon for breakfast, a salmon spinach salad with raspberry vinaigrette for lunch, a steak with a side of broccoli and a sweet potato (both smothered in real butter), and fresh berries with a little dark chocolate for dessert? Um, yes please. If that food bores you then we have totally different ideas of variety and exciting food.



**Solution:** Invest in a couple of cookbooks that you know contain healthy food options. I love paleo cookbooks, because although I don't follow a super-strict paleo diet (I eat some full-fat dairy, and gluten-free grains occasionally), I know that the meals will be free of sugar, soy, and other processed junk. And you can always adapt the recipe to fit your tastes and your nutrition program.

If I want to cook a meal out of a paleo cookbook, and I want to add some real butter and a side of white rice, I can. But I like knowing that the recipes will contain all REAL FOOD, and not crap.

You can also make your own food matrix like Robb Wolf where you list all of the foods you like to eat that fit your healthy eating lifestyle and you can come up with hundreds, if not thousands of food combinations so you don't get bored.

# Money

**T**his nutrition barrier is a very legitimate concern for many families interested in eating better. The corn, wheat, and soy industries are subsidized by the government, and therefore processed junk food is often much cheaper than unprocessed, healthy food. But there is hope.

First, get a very clear idea of how much you are spending on food every week. Add up your grocery bill, your fast food bill, and your restaurant expenditures so that you know what your budget looks like. I have a feeling you'll be surprised by how much money you actually spend on food while trying to "save" money by going through the drive through.

Once you know how much you spend weekly, make a budget. Figure out how much you want to spend at the grocery every week, and how much you want to spend on eating out (I realize this is entertainment for a lot of people, and it shouldn't be cut out completely). Once you have a budget, figuring out what you can spend on and what you can save on will be much easier, and you can employ some of the solutions listed below.

**Solutions:** (you may choose one of these, or you may have to use them in conjunction with one another, but they will all make eating better food more economical.)

**Choose wisely.** There are some foods that it's very important to buy organic. Meats, dairy products, and certain fruits and vegetables should be at the top of your list to purchase organic. On the other hand,

some foods, like these fruits and vegetables aren't as contaminated, and you don't need to buy organic.

Check the resources above to see what you should buy organic, and what doesn't matter as much.

**Buy in bulk.** A couple of years ago, my friend and I bought a cow together for \$2.50/lb. That included the ground beef, steaks, ribs, and more. Yes, we had to pay for some bones and other parts of the cow that we wouldn't be eating, but it still shook out to around \$4/lb. for hundreds of pounds of high-quality, grass-fed beef. You should also keep your eyes peeled for sales on some of your favorite foods and stock up when you can. That's what freezers are for!



**Buy local.** Find a local Farmer's Market in your area to buy locally grown, seasonal fruits, vegetables, and more. Not sure where to find one? Local Harvest is a fantastic resource. Search their site and you're sure to find one close by.

Buying local is not only less expensive because you cut out the middle man, but you actually get to talk to the person who is growing your food. You can ask questions about their farming practices, and you're helping support your local economy and small farmers.

If you don't have time to mill around the Farmer's Market each week, you can also look into joining a CSA (community supported agriculture) that will deliver locally grown food right to your door every week.

# Food Availability

**O**K so I just smashed the myth that you can't find good, local food in your area by giving you a resource to find Farmer's Markets, Farms, and CSA's in your area. But what about if you live in the dorms in college? What if you live in a sorority house? What if you're in the military overseas and don't have access to the best food?

I'll admit it... these are tough scenarios, but you don't have to give up entirely.

**S**olution: Do the best you can.

Try to get your hands on as much high quality, non-perishable food as possible like jerky, nuts, nut butters, coconut oil, apples, and avocados. You can even stock up on high quality protein powder, or protein bars.

Your nutrition might not be perfect, but you still have options. Don't give up!

It might not be ideal, but it's better than eating the other junk you're surrounded with. You (hopefully) won't be in that situation forever, and you'll have a new appreciation for fresh, delicious food once you are on your own and have the ability to cook for yourself.



*There you have it. The top 10 reasons you're not eating well, and specific advice on how you can fix the reasons that apply to your life. Remember, eating well shouldn't be a chore. It's a privilege. It's a gift that we give ourselves and our families.*

*Make it a priority in your life. You won't be sorry.*

*- Molly Galbraith*