

Forgot You Were on a Diet?

by Linda Spangle, RN, MA

Imagine you are a parent (even if you aren't) and that you took your two pre-school age children shopping at the mall. You wouldn't get so preoccupied that you'd "forget" you'd brought the kids along. Instead, the entire time you were shopping, you'd always know where your children were and what they were doing.

Most parents have a mental "antenna" that stays on alert, even after the kids are in bed. This built-in awareness or focus helps you know when your children are happy and contented as well as when they are at risk for harm.

It's this same ability that helps parents recognize broken rules or other behavior problems. My mother referred to this as the "eyes in the back of her head." I guess that's how she always caught me when I tried sneaking into the pantry to get cookies.

Successful weight management requires a similar level of focus. And when we let up on it, especially during times we feel weak or vulnerable, it's a setup for disaster.

How we lose focus

One of the most common times dieters lose focus is around holidays or special events. Think about what happens to you at Thanksgiving, a holiday that traditionally includes

family gatherings and LOTS of food. Last year, I enjoyed two Thanksgiving dinners, one with my family and another a couple days later with a group of friends.

During the meal with family members, I carefully monitored my what I was eating. I savored the cranberries and the stuffing, appreciated the sweet potatoes and other vegetables, but left a fair amount on my plate.

But at the second gathering, I somehow "forgot" to pay attention to my food intake. By the time the plates were cleared, I'd eaten way more than I'd intended. I pushed back from the table feeling totally stuffed, and a bit disgusted with myself for eating so much.

What went wrong? I didn't set out to overeat or ignore my diet. I simply lost my focus—the ability to stay aware of my eating plan even as I enjoyed the food and conversation.

Focus doesn't mean you can't have fun. Instead, it provides a way to hold continual awareness, in spite of what's going on around you. It means that you don't "forget" that you are striving to eat smaller portions, limit sweets or follow a specific diet plan.

A few tricks for staying focused

- **Remember it** Remind yourself



often that you are living in a healthy manner and staying on your diet or exercise plan.

- **Pull it back quickly** If you start slipping into old patterns, intentionally renew your focus. Remind yourself of your weight-loss goals and why they are important to you.
- **Take care of your emotions** Focus on ways to identify and express your emotions, especially during high-risk times such as holidays, birthdays or other special events.

Like any good parent, don't "forget" about your weight-loss efforts. Develop a special "antenna" that helps you stay focused on how you want to live every single day.

About Linda Spangle

Linda Spangle, RN, MA, is a weight-loss coach specializing in emotional eating, and the author of *100 Days of Weight Loss*, a book of daily lessons that helps people stay committed to their diet and exercise plans. Contact Linda at 303-452-1545 or by email at Linda@weightlossjoy.com. Her website is weightlossjoy.com.