

Gobbling extra stuffing: Willpower no match for cheap food, big portions

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Ditching the diet for Thanksgiving? Turkey with all the fixings isn't the only temptation causing would-be dieters to miss their goals, according to a new Cornell University review article that finds powerful environmental cues are subconsciously bending willpower every day.

"We're slaves to our environment," said David Levitsky, professor of [nutritional sciences](#) and of psychology at Cornell, who co-authored the article with graduate student Carly Pacanowski.

The article, "Free Will and the Obesity Epidemic," will be published in an upcoming print edition of the journal *Public Health Nutrition*.

Levitsky and Pacanowski analyzed hundreds of articles on eating behavior and found forces that individuals have no control over are heavily influencing the obesity epidemic in the United States. These forces include cheap food prices and ease of access to [unhealthy food](#). Social factors such as seeing others eat are also strong stimulants, Levitsky said, and have taken on more strength in the past 50 to 60 years, as restaurant dining becomes more frequent.

The article finds [portion size](#) emerged as one of the most powerful links to overeating. "And it's not just the amount you put on your plate, but also the package size from which the food comes determines how much you will eat," Levitsky said.

The article suggests dieters can weigh themselves and graph the results

on a daily basis to counter these forces because it boosts one's awareness of unconscious eating. It also suggests that the government plays a role in combating the [obesity epidemic](#) by subsidizing [fruits and vegetables](#), making low-calorie foods cheaper.

More information: <http://bit.ly/sY15hJ>

Provided by Cornell University

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