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How to eat less without trying: Tips from 'Muffin Tin Cookbook'

Authors of books such as 'Muffin Tin Cookbook' offer tips.

By Alisa Bowman, Special to The Morning Call

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A study out of the Netherlands found that strong-smelling foods trigger us to take smaller bites, which causes us to naturally fill up on fewer calories.

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Unfortunately, this is one of those research findings that's quite difficult to put into practice. If you love high-aroma foods, great. If you don't, it's not so great.

Good thing aroma isn't the only eat-less trick at your disposal. I asked a few foodies what they do to practice better portion control. Here are their tips.

•Cook your meals in muffin tins.

I was intrigued by a new cookbook by Brette Sember called "The Muffin Tin Cookbook," so I requested a review copy from the publisher. It's not a book about how to cook muffins. Rather, it's a cookbook about how to cook everything else — ranging from pasta to meat to fish — inside a muffin tin.

"Muffin tin cooking is perfect for easily controlling your portions," says Sember. "My teenage daughter, who is always looking for easy-dieting solutions, thinks it is the greatest idea ever. All of the recipes in my book contain nutritional information for one portion and each portion is one muffin cup. There's no fooling yourself by saying that you'll just have a tiny bit more or that perhaps you didn't take a full portion the first time."

Interested? Use these muffin tin cooking tips:

Cook with the end in mind. "Think about how you're going to get it out of the tin. Things like muffins and mini pies pop right out, but entrees and sides are usually best made in a liner," says Sember. "My liners of choice are silicone — they are nonstick, colorful and reusable, so they are earth-friendly."

Adapt your cooking time. "Things that take an hour to bake in a casserole dish will cook much more quickly in a muffin tin because they're sized into smaller portions," says Sember.

•Clear the table pronto.

"My biggest challenge with portion control hasn't been about what's on my plate. It's about not hovering over the ridiculous amounts of food my son leaves behind on his," admits Debbie Koenig, author of "Parents Need to Eat Too."

"That's why we clear the table as soon as possible. The longer those tempting noodles hang around, the more likely they are to wind up in my mouth. And when it's family mealtime, my husband clears and packs up the leftovers. If I'm not around the food, I can't eat it."

•Eat low calorie, high volume foods.

"Fruits and veggies — which have a high water content as well as fiber — are like a silver bullet," says Joy Manning, food editor at Prevention magazine and author of "Almost Meatless." "No one overeats spinach salad! I also suggest making plenty of broth-based soups. The liquid is stomach-filling, and you get fewer calories for the same sensible portion."

•Ruin your appetite.

"Eat a small amount of fat, like a few almonds, before dinner," adds Manning. "It slows stomach emptying and makes you feel full faster."

•Shrink your plate size.

"My dinner plates spend most of the time in the cabinet — I keep those mainly for special occasions," says Kristen Gough, a foodie and mother of three who pens the popular blog MyKidsEatSquid.com. "For most meals I use salad plates to keep the portions in check. When you use a larger plate the portions can seem small. With salad plates they look just right."

Alisa Bowman of Emmaus is a health journalist who also blogs at ProjectHappilyEverAfter.com. She is the author of "Project: Happily Ever After," a memoir about how she saved her marriage.

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