

One hundred and sixteen pounds or maybe it looks better like this: 116 pounds! That's how much Smart Bodies participants have lost in four weeks! Twenty-eight people signed up to participate in the LSU AgCenter Smart Portions Program from Lincoln and Jackson Parishes. They are challenging themselves to make small changes for big results.

Participants are learning to be more mindful of what they are eating. Eating when you're hungry, stopping when you're full seems like a simple concept; yet many of us struggle to put this principle into practice. People eat for many reasons; emotions, stress, anxiety, anger, loneliness, boredom, food cravings, rewards, and true hunger. The Smart Portions program is helping participants be more in tune with their bodies to understand what true hunger actually is. The participants took the habit survey, a tool that helps identify habits that might be keeping them from losing weight. We identified strategies to break the habits chain and control the outcome. Think of this example: You just ate a big meal, you are really stuffed! After cleaning the kitchen, you decide to watch television. A commercial comes on advertising a new double fudge concoction. You aren't even hungry, but now you really want something sweet to eat. You go back into the kitchen, open the refrigerator you spy back in the corner a five day old cupcake. You decide to eat just eat a bite to satisfy your sweet craving; before you know it, the cupcake is all gone! Participants identify alternatives, addressing the link in the chain of habit, and controlling the next link in the chain of consequences. Alternatives to this scenario could be to exercise or turn the television off during the commercials.

Smart Portions emphasizes taking time out for meals to make meal time meaningful. Tips at meal time to prevent over eating include: eating in one place set aside just for meals, sitting down to eat, gathering the family around the table. At this time you can catch up on the day, have a relaxing conversation, and don't discuss stressful events at this time. Use smaller dinner plates, bowls and glasses to prevent overeating. Keeping serving dishes or containers off the table may prevent second serving when you are satisfied or full. Avoid other activities while eating. Distractions like watching television or catching up on emails at the table can lead to chronic overeating and reduced satisfaction. Focus on just eating and enjoying the meal. Eat slower than usual and take small bites. It takes approximately twenty minutes for signals to transmit from the stomach back to the brain to tell your body that you are full.

Eating is a part of our daily activities. We can enjoy our food, we just need to eat less of it and exercise daily. Eating healthy and exercising can help us maintain a healthy weight, prevent chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney complications, gallbladder disease and hypertension. Excess weight puts more stress on the joints of our knees, ankles and hips. Over time this can cause the wearing away of cartilage, causing bone to rub against bone. Some cancers are weight related too, especially breast and prostate cancer. By losing 10 percent of our body weight we can lower our risk for type 2 diabetes. Losing 10 percent of our weight can lower cholesterol and reduce your blood pressure, two major factors for heart disease. Losing 10 percent of our body weight can also give us more energy, and boost self-confidence.

Smart Portions encourages participants to exercise. There are many benefits of exercising. Exercise strengthens the heart and lungs, gives us energy, helps us to sleep better, helps control blood pressure, prevents against the start of type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. It also helps us to concentrate and it improves digestion and elimination. Participants test their endurance, flexibility, and strength to see how they are doing physically.

There are four more Smart Portions lesson left. I want to commend these committed participants for making healthy changes for a healthier life and for encouraging each other. It takes one day at a time for change to occur. Don't give up!

If you would like more information on the Smart Portions program go to the lsuagcenter.com.