It’s easy to spot our love-handles. No problem. What’s difficult is determining the cause. Despite constant chatter from nutrition zealots about “junk” foods and diet trends, most people remain clueless about the actual triggers behind the population’s weight-gain.

There’s certainly no shortage of fall guys for the plus sized: starch, fat, sugar (just to name a few). Pick any box in the food pyramid and you’ll find a food previously singled out as the scourge of obesity. But you won’t find an effective solution.

Because lifestyle, not diet, is the main cause of obesity.

Leaving nutritionists to battle amongst themselves, ordinary Americans can look to their homes and offices to find the triggers for our steady weight-gain. An inventory of our daily lives reveals thousands of seemingly small decisions that collectively explain our burgeoning behinds. Here are just a few:

• **Labor Saving Devices:** Appliances aren’t figure-friendly. Researchers at the Mayo Clinic calculated that replacing manual chores — like washing dishes, mowing the lawn, and cleaning the car — with their automated versions can decrease energy expenditure from 10,500 to 1,700 calories every month. (That rate could pack on 30 pounds in one year.)

• **Couch Potatoes & Cars:** We sit a lot. The average time spent watching television (1,672 hours) and the percentage of workers who commute by car (88 percent) have steadily risen over the past few decades. This time spent off our feet is showing up on our scales. Researchers found that for every additional 60 minutes per day people spend in a car, their odds of being obese increase by 6 percent.
• **GRINDING TO A HALT:** Sitting up straight, vacuuming the house, chewing gum, and even fidgeting are all exercise in disguise. Improving your posture throughout the day can burn an extra 350 calories. Fidgeting can give your metabolism as much as a 40 percent bump above its resting level. Researchers estimate that these mini-activities vary by as much as 2000 calories each day from one person to the next. But we’re simply moving less than earlier generations.

• **THERMOSTAT TROUBLE:** A human body must work to keep its temperature around 98.6°F. The farther (colder or hotter) the surrounding temperature moves from that ideal temperature, the more energy the body burns. But modern air-conditioning and heating keep our metabolisms from working too hard. One study calculated the energy difference between a climate-controlled and a mildly cold environment can be as much as 347 calories a day.

• **LABORLESS LABOR FORCE:** Studies show that every two hours spent sitting at work is linked to a 5-7 percent increase in obesity. And the American work day is increasingly spent in the comfort of a chair. The number of Americans employed in low-activity occupations grew from 16 million in 1950 to 58.2 million in 2000. Even changes as little as spending two minutes each hour sending e-mails to colleagues rather than two minutes walking speak their offices can translate into more than a pound gained each year.