

INTUITIVE EATING

BUILDING A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

WHAT IS INTUITIVE EATING?

Intuitive eating is not a diet, but an approach to eating that is centered around forming a positive relationship with food and toward your body image. It is built on the principle that diets are not sustainable; for long term improvements to our health, we need to make lifestyle changes. Intuitive eating is about listening to your body, recognizing the way you feel when you are hungry and when you are full and letting that guide your eating patterns. There are no “good” foods or “bad” foods. All foods should be eaten and enjoyed. Research has shown that intuitive eating is associated with weight maintenance; improved mental health, body image, and self-esteem; and is more sustainable than typical diets.



PRINCIPLES OF INTUITIVE EATING

Reject the Diet Mentality

There is a reason that more often than not, diets fail. It is because they force drastic changes to our eating habits and are not sustainable. Begin by freeing yourself from calorie counting and rules around food.

Honor Your Hunger

Eat when you are hungry. Waiting until we reach the point of starvation leaves us more likely to eat too much too quickly.

Make Peace with Food

Take the idea of “bad” foods off the table. Understand that all foods fit. When we restrict ourselves from foods, they become the forbidden fruit and can cause bingeing and guilt when we eat them. If you allow yourself to eat these foods, you will likely find that you can eat them in moderation or may even ask yourself, do I really want this?

Challenge the Food Police

Flick those voices in your head off your shoulders that praise you for eating less calories and scold you when you have dessert.

Discover the Satisfaction Factor

Find enjoyment in mealtime. Limit distractions and pay attention to the taste and texture of your food. Notice how you feel after eating – what foods make you feel good and what foods don't?

Feel Your Fullness

Eat slowly and pause throughout to ask yourself: Am I still hungry? Am I eating because I am bored or distracted? Observe these cues and stop when you are comfortably full.

Cope with Your Emotions Without Using Food

Discover the emotions that trigger changes in your eating. It is common for people to overeat due to stress, anger, anxiety, loneliness, or boredom. Even restricting yourself from eating certain foods can cause these feelings. Find healthy ways to address these emotions that do not involve food.

Respect Your Body

Accept your body for what it is. Try to avoid being overly critical and comparing yourself to others – have realistic expectations about your weight.

Movement - Feel the Difference

Avoid choosing exercises based on how many calories they burn. Rather, find exercise that you enjoy and will want to do each day.

Honor Your Health with Gentle Nutrition

Choose foods that provide healthy nourishment for your body that you enjoy eating. Don't punish yourself for having an unhealthy meal or snack. Strive for healthy habits, not perfection.

PHYSICAL HUNGER VS. EMOTIONAL HUNGER

Physical Hunger

- Comes on gradually
- Stops when you are full
- Open to eating a variety of foods
- What you may be feeling: growling stomach, body feeling weak or shaky
- Eating will not trigger an emotional reaction

Emotional Hunger

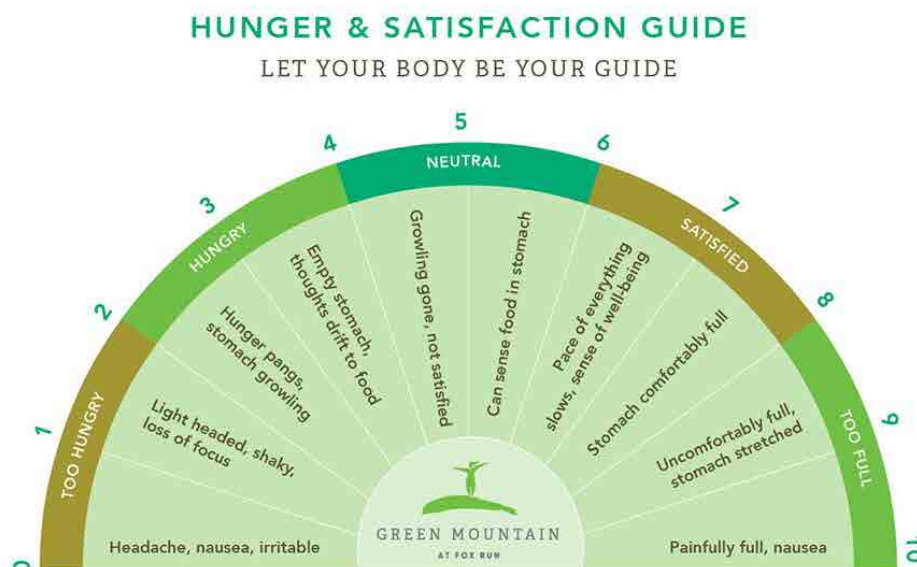
- Comes on suddenly
- Continues even when you are full
- Likely have a strong craving for a particular food
- What you may be feeling: boredom, sadness, loneliness, anxious
- Eating may cause feelings of guilt or regret

TIPS TO START EATING INTUITIVELY

Learn to distinguish between physical hunger and emotional hunger. Start paying attention to your body's hunger and fullness cues by using the guide below. Avoid waiting to eat until you are in the "too hungry" category.

When eating, be present and mindful. Sit at the table, put away your phone, and turn off the tv. Focus on your meal. Eat slowly. Pay attention to how your food tastes and smells and enjoy it. If you eliminate distractions, it will make it easier for you to be aware of when you are full and prevent you from getting too full. Remember that just because there is still food in front of you, it doesn't mean you have to finish it.

Go easy on yourself. If you notice you overeat one day and are uncomfortably full, don't criticize yourself. Intuitive eating is not about perfection, but about learning to listen to your body. If you recognize that you are overly full, you are doing the right thing!



*Individual appetite cues can vary and these are just suggestions.
Explore how your body informs you.*

Concept adapted from Learning/Teaching Handout Series CD on Eating Disorders. Sondra Kronberg, MS, RD, CEDRD. Wellness Publishing. 2001.
Green Mountain at Fox Run. (2013, January 28). Mindful Eating Strategies to End Eating and Weight Struggles. <https://www.fitwoman.com/blog/weight-management-mindful-eating/>.