

The Anti-Diet: Making Peace with Food through Intuitive Eating

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Each year, many people make new year's resolutions involving healthier eating behaviors and/or losing weight; however, approximately 64% of people abandon these goals within a month (Dickson, Moberly, Preece, Dodd, & Huntley, 2021). There are a number of reasons why people do not stick to these goals, such as making goals that are too vague (Dickson et al., 2021). In American culture, many people gravitate towards fad diets, which are often unsustainable in the long-term and can have negative health implications (Khawandanah & Tewfik, 2016). Focusing on lifestyle changes can be a much more successful approach (Khawandanah & Tewfik, 2016). Intuitive eating, also known as mindful eating, can be a strategy to assist with healthier eating behaviors and a more balanced relationship with food.

Intuitive eating focuses on *how* you eat versus *what* you eat. It is an approach that does not restrict your behaviors. Rather, it focuses on how your body feels and what your body needs to feel nourished. Your hunger cues serve as a roadmap to making ongoing decisions about *what* we eat, as well as *how much* we eat. Below are some strategies to assist with eating in a more mindful manner:

- **Rate your level of hunger before eating:** Before you reach for a mid-afternoon snack or eat a meal at dinnertime, it can be helpful to rate your hunger on a 1 to 10 scale with 1 being starving and 10 being uncomfortably stuffed. Once you identify how hungry you are, you can then make decisions on how much your body is needing at that moment. For example, if you are at a "4" (a little bit hungry), a small snack such as a banana, a bag of pretzels, or a couple hardboiled eggs may do the trick. In contrast, if you are at a "2" (hungry and stomach is growling), your body is needing more nourishment and could benefit from an actual meal.
- **Check in with yourself while you eat:** As you eat, continue to pay attention to how your body feels. If you are still feeling hungry, continuing to eat is important. However, as you begin to notice yourself feeling satisfied and full, you know that you are approaching a good point to stop eating.
- **There are no "good" or "bad" foods:** In our culture, we often label foods as "good" or "bad"; however, food is food. It serves the purpose of nourishing our bodies and giving us fuel to sustain us. It is okay to have that piece of cake or bag of chips from time to time, even though our culture often labels these as "bad" foods. With intuitive eating, it is important that we do not restrict ourselves, as this can be a recipe for overeating and/or bingeing on foods that are less nourishing for our bodies. Therefore, give yourself permission to have that cookie every now and again.
- **Be gentle with yourself:** Many times, we are often hardest on ourselves. If you have a moment when you eat more than what your body is needing or ate something that is less nourishing to your body, give yourself some compassion. It is okay. These things happen. This does not make you a failure or bad person, and you do not need to punish yourself for this behavior. Tell yourself it is okay, engage in a self-nurturing activity, and then move forward.
- **Notice when emotions may be leading to eating:** Emotional eating is a real thing. It can be easy to utilize food as a self-soothing strategy when we are stressed, sad, lonely,

tired, or experiencing other challenging emotions. It can be helpful to check in with ourselves about what we are needing to meet our emotional needs when we are feeling upset. There may be times when you may need something other than food to meet that need, such as calling a friend, taking a walk, dancing it out to your favorite song, or listening to a podcast.

With a shift in *how* you eat versus *what* you eat, you may notice a huge shift and greater peace in your relationship with food.

References

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