



THE EAT WITH KNOWLEDGE GUIDE TO INTUITIVE EATING

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feel fabulous about food



We are dietitians who are passionate about helping our clients feel fabulous about food. Please use this guide as part of your own journey to Intuitive Eating. It is meant for support, and it's okay if you come back to these principles again and again for added reflection as your journey continues.

Thank you so much to Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch for writing Intuitive Eating. We are forever grateful to Evelyn and Elyse for changing our lives, personally and professionally. We recommend that anyone reading this guide also purchases a copy of Intuitive Eating and/or the Intuitive Eating Workbook.

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Reject the Diet Mentality

Diet mentality is a false belief that diets for weight loss create health and happiness. Diet mentality steals your joy by saying you should delay your dreams until you have lost weight. Diet mentality erodes body trust and replaces it with external rules. It disconnects you from your own body sensations, making you feel powerless and like you cannot be trusted to make decisions about how to feed yourself.

Diet mentality is the mean voice you hear over and over which categorizes food into good and bad or healthy and unhealthy. It is the voice that tells you ridiculous rules such as “no eating after 7pm”, “no carbs after lunch”, or “no dessert because you didn’t exercise”. Many people think this voice means they should have more control. Rather, this voice acts like a bully that keeps you from living your fullest life. The diet mentality tells us that we cannot be trusted to know how to best nourish ourselves.

- Dieting is associated with biological damage (slowed metabolism, increased binges/cravings) and psychological/emotional damage (lower self-esteem/confidence, feelings of failure, increased anxiety/body checking)
- While the principles of Intuitive Eating are **not** meant to be hierarchical, embracing this principle of “rejecting the diet mentality” is the foundation of feeling fabulous about food.
- Only when we throw out diet mentality do we begin to rebuild trust with our own bodies, acknowledging that we have the wisdom to know what, when and how much to eat without relying on any outside influences. This conversation with our bodies takes time to re-establish. But as we learn trust, we see how recovery is so worthwhile and empowering.

What does “diet” mean to you? What diets have you tried before?

principle
01

How has dieting impacted your life?

- Think about physical, social, psychological ways that the diet mentality has impacted your life.
- Consider behaviors that have resulted from diet culture.
- Have you put any aspects of your life on hold until after you change your weight?

What do you believe will happen if you change your weight?

- Think about where these beliefs come from?

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Honor Your Hunger

Eat when you are hungry! This principle seems so simple, but is very difficult for many people. Fueling the body with adequate nutrition is a key component in developing a peaceful relationship with food. Nourishing the body appropriately helps to increase attunement and offers the opportunity to eat mindfully and begin actualizing the concept of reestablishing a relationship with one's body.

We are born with the ability to honor our hunger. Babies cry when they are hungry and turn their heads away when they have been adequately nourished. But sometimes we lose this ability to tune in. This can occur for many reasons such as diet culture, certain emotional states (stress, anxiety, depression) or an eating disorder.

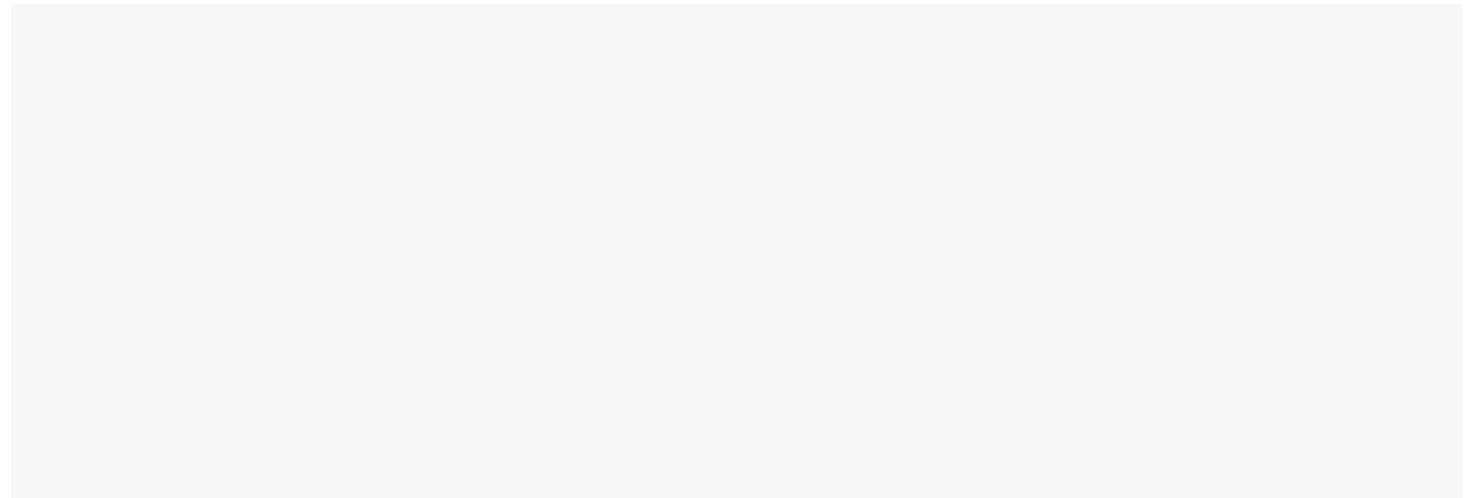
- Hunger is dynamic! We are not meant to eat the same foods and the same amount of food each day. Things like the amount of sleep, physical activity, hormones, components of the last meal, stress and so many more things influence hunger.
- Eating carbohydrates, proteins, fats, fruits and vegetables at most meals and snacks lays the foundation for balance. From this place of nutritional adequacy and emotional well-being you can determine if that hot fudge sundae will feel good, or if an apple and peanut butter will serve you better in this moment.

Reconnect with your body by considering physical cues that you experience as you go through your day.

- Consider where you feel sensations such as thirst, stress, anxiety, exhaustion, happiness, excitement, etc.

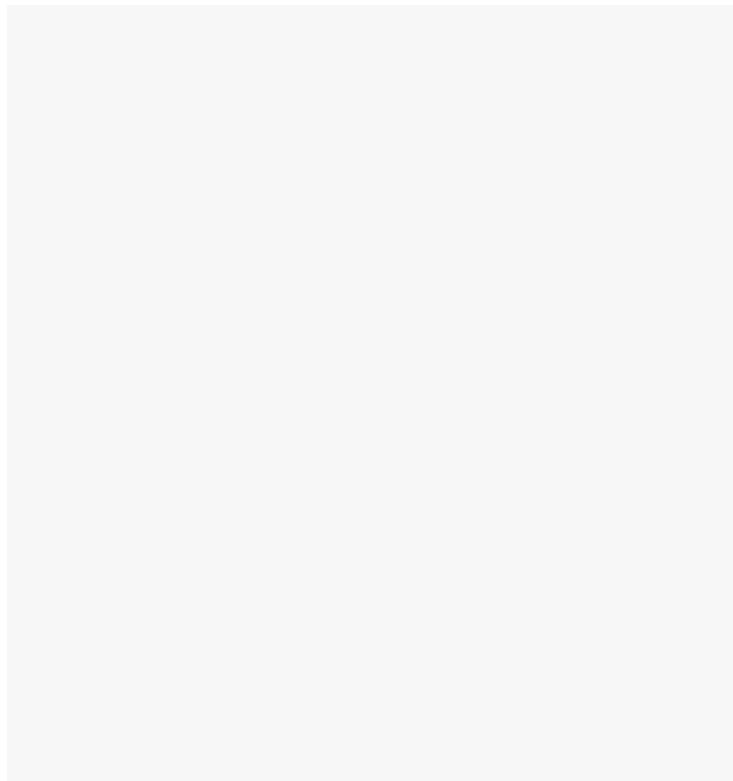
What does hunger feel like in your body?

- Think about physical, emotional and/or psychological signs that may indicate you are feeling hungry.



Practice using a hunger/fullness scale.

- Tune into your body and begin to rate your hunger before eating and your fullness after eating.
- Notice what it feels like when you wait to eat until you are ravenous and what it feels like when you eat until you are overstuffed.



Make Peace With Food

Give yourself unconditional permission to eat all foods! There are no “good foods” or “bad foods”, but rather all foods have their place in a balanced eating pattern. Either through physical and/or mental restriction we may tell ourselves that we should limit our intake of a particular food because it is “bad” for us. The more we restrict or forbid a food, the more that food tends to consume our thoughts and heightens our desire for that particular food more.

Once we allow ourselves permission to eat our “forbidden” foods, the foods eventually lose their allure. This is called habituation. After having repeated exposure to a food, the food is no longer as exciting. For example, think about when you make a favorite food and then eat the leftovers for several days. Eventually there is less excitement about eating the food, since you have eaten it a few times.

- One food, one meal, one day or even one week will not have a lasting impact on health.
- Giving yourself permission to eat the fun foods you crave and enjoy is a part of balanced eating. Knowing you can have fun foods whenever you want prevents feelings of deprivation and helps you to eat these foods in a way that feels good in your body.
- This principle may feel very scary initially. Trust yourself and take it one ‘forbidden’ food at a time. Remind yourself that it is possible for you to have food freedom!

Identify barriers that are keeping you from “Making Peace With Food”

- Make a list of your “forbidden foods”
- Write down any fears that you have about eating these foods

Do a food exposure using the list you created above.

- Choose one “forbidden” food to start with.
- Before eating this food, make sure you are well nourished, well-rested, and not stressed. Make sure the environment around you is peaceful and non-chaotic.
- Start eating the food and notice the texture and flavor. Are you enjoying the food? Is it satisfying?
- Later in the day think about whether eating this particular food had an impact on the way you felt and/or ate for the rest of the day.
- You may have to repeat this several times with one food, particularly if this is a food that you have been restricting for a long time or have very charged emotions around.



Challenge The Food Police

The food police are the voices in your head that try to enforce food rules that you have developed throughout your life. These food rules are rooted in diet culture and could have been introduced to you through a variety of sources such as a newspaper article that you read, something a fitness coach told you or something that one of your parents or siblings has said. For example, say you wanted to have a bagel for breakfast. The food police may tell you that carbs are bad and therefore make you feel guilt associated with eating the bagel or even wanting to eat the bagel. The food police are judging all of your decisions about the foods that you eat.

There are several reasons that it is important to challenge the food police on your path to becoming an intuitive eater. It is impossible to listen to your body's cues and learn what your body needs/wants when you have the food police in your head. The guilt or shame that the food police often make people feel should NOT be reserved for eating food. The food police will also cause you to hold on to some type of restriction, which will interfere with your ability to make peace with food (intuitive eating principle 3).

- Dieting leads to “all or none” thinking. Remember, you do not lack willpower and should not feel negatively about yourself based on the foods that you want to eat or have eaten.
- There is no “perfect” eater, meal pattern or superfood regardless of what the Food Police and diet culture tell you!

What food rules or eating behaviors have you developed over the years?

- Explore where these ideas originated from.
- Consider how you feel if you “break” one of your food rules.

Challenge your food rules.

- Try to reframe these absolute rules into more flexible and rational thoughts.
- Consider what you would say to a friend if they “broke” one of your food rules.

Replace the bully voice with self-compassion.

- Write down examples of negative self-talk that you've experienced (i.e. I hate myself for eating those cookies).
- Now try to reframe that thought in a way that shows yourself compassion (i.e. Cookies were exactly what I wanted to eat in that moment, and they tasted great).

Feel Your Fullness

The goal of this principle is to reconnect with your body to help determine when you are no longer hungry. As babies/children, we are innately good at knowing when we are full and naturally stop eating. As we grow older, there can be family members or other distractions that begin to interfere with or make us question our ability to determine when we are full. Some examples of this include eating food in front of the TV or while reading the newspaper, when parents tell their children to finish everything on their plate or going on a diet and being told how much to eat. All of these external influences slowly, overtime move us farther away from feeling connected to our body and feeling that we can trust our body's signals.

Another important piece of this is respecting your appetite. We wouldn't question ourselves if we went to the bathroom and 2 hours later had to go again. If we eat a meal and 2 hours later feel hungry again, this is our body's way of telling us that we need more fuel. Likewise, if you are already full and someone tries to get you to eat more food, it is important to be able to say no thank you. This is where setting boundaries comes in.

- Eventually, you will develop a better understanding of what level of hunger feels best for you to eat (likely before you are ravenous) and at what level of fullness feels best in your body (likely before feeling stuffed).
- Consider the importance of "staying power" as Elyse and Evelyn call it. This means evaluating if you are staying full after your meals or feeling hungry very soon after finishing the meal.

Identify distractions that you experience while eating.

- Consider how frequently these distractions occur (each meal, daily, once in a while).
- Think about what it would feel like to eat without these distractions.



Experiment with a hunger/fullness scale where 1 indicates a feeling of an empty stomach and 10 indicates fullness to the point of feeling sick.

- Try to rate how you are feeling before, during and after eating a meal.
- This may be very difficult at first but gets easier as we reconnect with our body.

Evaluate the “staying power” of your meals.

- Keep a journal of meals or snacks that you enjoy and/or consume frequently.
- Note how long after eating each meal/snack you begin to feel hungry again.

Discover The Satisfaction Factor

The goal of this Intuitive Eating principle is to tune into your body to figure out what foods sound satisfying versus what foods do not. When we are given a specific meal plan or list of foods that we are “allowed to eat” (as is often the case with diets) rather than thinking about what sounds good to us, we are often left unsatisfied. Sometimes we may avoid eating foods that we want because we feel guilt or shame when we “give in”. The issue with this, is that when left unsatisfied, we are prone to eat more of whatever we allow ourselves to eat instead.

- Don’t feel frustrated if this is particularly challenging for you. That is the case for many people who have been on diets or meal plans for much of their life. For so long, diets have dictated what you are “allowed” to eat, so it may take time to discover what foods actually taste good to you.
- The main goal of all of the intuitive eating principles is to increase satisfaction in your life.



Think about what would make a food/snack/meal satisfying to you.

- Consider texture, smell, flavor, temperature.
- How filling do you want this meal or snack to be?

Examine your eating environment.

- Think about what makes an eating environment satisfying versus chaotic.
- What are a few simple changes you could make to your eating environment to increase your eating experience (i.e. turn off tv, clear non-food related items off of the table, put a candle in the middle of the table, etc...)

Experiment with a satisfaction scale where 1 represents feeling disgusted by a food/meal and 10 indicates feeling too satisfied/sick.

- Check in with yourself throughout the meal. Rate yourself on the satisfaction scale when you start eating, midway through the meal and at the end of the meal.

Cope With Your Emotions With Kindness

As humans we all experience a wide range of emotions each day. Some come and go effortlessly, while others feel quite intense. This principle invites us to find ways to soothe and comfort ourselves, as we deserve to do, without relying on food as the solution. This principle offers us the opportunity to pause and reflect upon the source of the discomfort and learn skills to nurture and distract ourselves so we can move forward with more ease.

Emotional eating is a loaded topic, primarily because of diet culture and the fat-phobic society we inhabit. If there was not a fear of weight gain, there would likely be less stigma around emotional eating. The reality is we all eat emotionally. Food is central to most celebrations and we eat not only for fuel, but also for pleasure, and yes, sometimes comfort. The “problem” arises when we either restrict or “overeat” as the only means of numbing out/escaping our emotions.

- Without adequate self-care, it can be very difficult to be attuned to your body cues (such as hunger/fullness). Work towards appropriate sleep, adequate and balanced nourishment, a balance of work and play, and stress management.
- If you notice that you are eating a lot when you are not actually feeling true hunger, it is possible that you are using food as a way to cope with your emotions. It can be helpful to have a list of other tools that you can turn to as a way to sooth or comfort yourself.

Begin to recognize how you experience a range of emotions

- Think about how different emotions are felt in different parts of your body.
- Make a list of emotions as you experience them and write down where you physically “feel” that emotion (i.e. stress may present as a headache or tension in your shoulders)

Develop a list of coping skills for the emotions listed above.

- Make a list of 2-3 things that you can do to manage your feelings (i.e. in response to anxiety, I do some breathing exercises).
- This is very personal. What works for you, may be very different than what works for someone else.

Practice self-care.

- Assess areas in your life where you believe your self-care could be gently improved (i.e. sleep). Remember, this is meant to make you feel better and should not cause additional stress.
- What can you start to do to work towards the above goals (i.e. turning off the TV 30 minutes earlier and getting into bed)?

Respect Your Body

Each and every one of us is born with a unique set of DNA that determines how tall we are, the color of our eyes, the size of your foot, AND the size and shape of your body. Diet culture leads us to believe that we can manipulate our size via dieting, however we know that for the vast majority of people, any weight lost, within 2-5 years will return and possibly more. Respecting our body means learning to accept, or at least tolerate our body.

For some this initially feels like “giving up” but truthfully it is about “letting go”. It is about liberating oneself from the notion that you need to be a certain size to be happy or successful. Our bodies are the vehicle with which we get to show up in the world and do the work we are meant to do, have the relationships that fulfill us, and do all the things that bring us meaning and joy.

When we let go of expectations of changing our bodies, we can begin to tune in to what our bodies actually need. Respecting your body means treating it with care and kindness. It means moving it in a way that feels joyful, nourishing it adequately, getting appropriate sleep, managing stress, brushing your teeth and doing all the things necessary for your wellbeing.

- Stop / reduce body checking – stop stepping on the scale, looking in the mirror or as you pass store windows, pinching or placing your hands around areas of your body or trying on clothes in your closet to check your size, because it never serves to make you feel better and only serves to increase judgement.
- Throw away clothes that don’t fit or are uncomfortable. It is not helpful to look at a closet full of clothes that make you feel sad and yearn for a body that is different from your current body. Make sure you have plenty of items in your closet that feel good on your body.

Respecting your body means appreciating all that it is capable of.

- Make a list of the aspects of your body that you feel grateful for (i.e. your beating heart, having the ability to walk, giving hugs to your loved ones).

We are often harder on ourselves than we would be on our close friends.

- Make a list of things that you believe your friends like about you or what you believe makes you a good friend.

Dieting and negative body talk are often common topics at social gatherings.

- Make a list of other topics that you would like to talk about that are not related to weight and body.
- Brainstorm some strategies to remove yourself from this type of conversation if you do not feel comfortable changing the subject.

Movement: Feel the Difference

Movement is a celebration of what the body can do, not punishment for what you ate or your body size. Exercise helps us to appreciate our strengths and how our bodies can be a vehicle for joy. Movement is a way to connect to our body and serves to increase vitality and energy.

Oftentimes, people pair their exercise routine with a diet. The issue with this is that diets typically restrict consumption/fuel to some degree, and this makes exercise feel more strenuous and unpleasant. When we are able to shift our mindset and approach exercise from a place of self-care and body kindness, we are able to find a type of movement that is enjoyable and feels truly energizing.

- Carbohydrates are our bodies preferred fuel source! When we don't eat adequate carbohydrate, our body starts to break down muscle protein to get the energy that it needs.
- There are many benefits to movement that are unrelated to weight such as stress reduction, improved mood, decreased anxiety, increased bone strength, increased cardiovascular health and reduced risk of several chronic diseases.
- When the mind/body connection is strong, we can engage in intuitive movement. This means recognizing what is going to feel good in your body on a particular day. Some days this could mean being active and on other days, you may notice that what you truly need is rest.

Consider your goals for movement.

- What do you hope to achieve as a result of joyful movement (non-weight related)?

What are your barriers to engaging in regular movement?

- Choose 2-3 barriers and brainstorm a solution to overcome each barrier.

Make a list of any activities or types of movement that you have done before and enjoyed.

- Consider what aspects of the activity made it enjoyable for you (i.e. inside vs. outside, with/without other people, sweaty vs. not sweaty, etc...)
- Is this an activity that you could do regularly? If not, what is another activity that you could try that would meet similar criteria.



Honor Your Health: Gentle Nutrition

Diet culture has created unnecessary stress and confusion around food and health, and it can be very overwhelming. In fact, research has shown that constant worry and stress about food is in itself unhealthy. Eating should make us feel good and satisfied as well as provide nourishment!

Though the intuitive eating principles are not meant to be hierarchical, ideally when we approach this final intuitive eating principle, we have made significant strides with the rest of the intuitive eating principles. We should be more attuned to our hunger/fullness/satisfaction cues as well as begin to have a sense of what feels good in our body. If we attempt this principle too early in our intuitive eating journey, it can be difficult to not let diet culture seep back in and influence our food choices.

This is the part of intuitive eating where we consider how different foods impact how we feel physically and psychologically. We may notice, for example, that eating chocolate at the end of a day is relaxing and helps us wind down from the craziness of the day. Similarly, we may realize that on vacation, we didn't eat as many fruits and vegetables as we typically do and therefore came home feeling bloated and constipated. The key to this principle is non-judgmentally noticing and acknowledging how different foods make us feel and removing any guilt, shame or anxiety around these observations.

- This is where intuitive eating with chronic disease comes in. For example, someone with diabetes may realize that they don't feel particularly well after eating something high in sugar as a snack, but feel better with a combination of carbs and protein.
- The goal is progress, not perfection! Remember, there is no perfect food or meal plan and there are many determinants of health other than food and exercise (i.e. genetics, environment, medical care, psychological health, etc...).



Consider what motivates your food choices (typically it is best to complete this activity several times throughout the week and when you are hungry and trying to choose what to eat).

- Are you choosing foods to eat because they taste good, keep you full longer, are deemed “superfoods”?

Make a list of foods that you eat regularly or often.

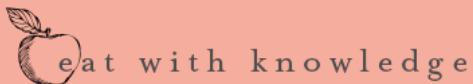
- After you eat each of these foods, consider how you feel. Do you feel energized, tired, happy, still hungry, etc...?



Experiment with your relationship to play food (this is a gentler way of referring to what diet culture calls "junk food").

- How do you feel when you eat play foods both mentally, physically and emotionally?
- Is there a certain amount that you eat before experiencing changes to how you feel?

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