

If you have any questions, ask your physician or care team.

Mindful Eating

Today many people have easy access to high calorie foods and do less physical activity. This type of lifestyle can cause weight gain.

When some people have easy access to food, they may eat when they are not really hungry. They can gain weight by eating too many calories. It's important to know that sometimes we eat for physical reasons and sometimes we eat for emotional reasons.

Physical hunger

When we are physically hungry, our body tells us. The stomach starts to rumble, and we start to feel that it is time for our next meal. Physical hunger comes on about 4 hours after eating a meal. Physical hunger is controlled by hormones released from the stomach.

Physical hunger is that empty feeling in your stomach. However, it can be hard to tell the difference between a craving (strong desire) and actual physical hunger.

There are some signs of physical hunger. You might be physically hungry if you:

- Feel a physical emptiness in your stomach
- Hear a rumbling or growling noise from your stomach
- Have the sensation of hunger pangs (contractions in your stomach when it is empty)
- Feel weak or lightheaded when you go without eating for a long time

Emotional eating

Sometimes, we also eat for emotional reasons. This has nothing to do with how much food is already in the digestive tract. When we eat for emotional reasons, it tends to come on suddenly. We want a specific taste or kind of food. In these cases, eating can be linked to:

- Emotions
- Cravings
- Social situations
- Stress
- Habits

Just thinking about a kind of food can make us want to eat it.

When we mostly eat for emotional reasons, we often lose touch with our natural feelings of physical hunger and feeling full. We stop asking ourselves “Am I hungry?” and “What am I hungry for?” and eat when we are not physically hungry.

How to tell if you are physically hungry

If you are still not sure if you are feeling physical hunger, ask yourself these questions:

- When was my last meal or snack? If it was less than 2 hours ago, you are probably not truly hungry.
- Am I craving a specific food? Would anything make me feel better other than food? If you only want a specific food, that is generally a craving.
- Am I thirsty? Try drinking a glass of water before you have a snack. Thirst can sometimes feel like hunger.
- Are you tired or sleepy? Often when you are tired your brain tells you that you need food to stay awake when in reality you just need more sleep. If you are not getting an average of 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night, then you should try to sleep more each night. Then you will feel less hungry throughout the day.

You should eat most of your meals and snacks when you have physical hunger.

Quick tip: When you feel hungry, ask yourself if you are interested in a hard-boiled egg or piece of chicken. If you are truly hungry, a high-protein, low-sugar food will sound appealing. If it does not, your body probably does not need food.

Hunger/fullness scale

The hunger/fullness scale ranks the feelings of being very hungry (1) to being very full (10). The goal is to feel between 4 and 7.

1	So hungry you want to eat anything you can.
2	Very hungry. All food looks good. You may be preoccupied with your hunger.
3	Hungry and the urge to eat is strong.
4	A little hungry. You can wait to eat, but you know you will be getting hungrier soon.
5	Neutral. Not hungry. Not full.
6	No longer hungry. You sense food in your belly, but you could definitely eat more.
7	Comfortably satisfied. Hunger is definitely gone. Stop here and you may not feel hungry again for 2 to 3 hours.
8	Not uncomfortable, but feeling like you have a full belly.
9	Moving into an uncomfortable feeling of fullness.
10	Very uncomfortable, maybe even painfully full.

Hypereating and overeating

Hypereating is a type of behavior that a person may develop after eating very stimulating foods. Some ingredients in processed food can be very stimulating. This stimulation increases dopamine (a chemical that your brain releases that makes you feel good). Someone who is hypereating may be seeking that “high” from eating these types of processed foods.

Overeating is when you consume more food than your body needs. It may or may not include hypereating.

To find if you are hypereating or overeating, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I lose control when faced with food I find delicious?
- Do I feel I am not full even after eating a portion of food that usually fills me up? Do I think about food a lot?
- Am I preoccupied with thinking about meals and eating?

Start mindful eating

Mindful eating can help you learn healthy habits and possibly lose weight. Eat 1 meal a day or week in a slower, more attentive manner. Here are some tips that may help you get started:

- Set your kitchen timer for 20 minutes. Take that time to eat a normal-sized meal.
- Try eating with your non-dominant hand; if you are a righty, hold your fork in your left hand when you put food in your mouth.
- Eat silently for 5 minutes. Think about what it took to make that meal, from the sun’s rays to the farmer to the grocer to the cook.
- Take small bites and chew well.
- Before opening the fridge or cabinet, take a breath and ask yourself, “Am I really hungry?” If not, do something else, like reading or going on a short walk.

Also think about where you eat. If you eat in front of a screen, computer, phone or TV, you are more likely to eat 200 calories or more than if you did not. Eat at a table, have a great conversation and eat slowly.

Change your unhelpful eating habits

Take time to mark the possible problem areas that may be leading you to poor eating habits. If you answer yes to any of these, make an effort to change the habit.

Possible Problem Areas	Yes	No
Not pre-planning meals and snacks		
Skipping meals		
Not eating for 4 to 6 hours while you are awake		
Not eating according to a schedule (endless grazing and munching)		
Eating too many snacks		
Mindless eating (not realizing what you are eating because you are distracted)		
Eating because you are bored, not hungry		
Eating a little during day, then overeating at night (nighttime eating)		
Getting up and eating in the middle of the night		
Eating out or ordering out often		
Other:		

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