

Mindful Eating

Food is a needed and often enjoyable part of life. However, you may not always eat because you are hungry. You may eat when you are bored, stressed, sad, or simply because you enjoy eating. Understanding **why** you eat is just as important as **what** and **how much** you eat. Learning to eat mindfully will help you avoid extreme hunger and overeating.

Hunger scale

Listen to your body's cues for hunger and fullness. Use the hunger scale to help you learn to **eat when you feel slightly hungry (level 4) and stop when you are satisfied (level 6)**. Eating in this zone is known as mindful eating. **Key decision points exist at levels 3 and 7**. Waiting to eat past level 3 puts you at risk for overeating and making poor food choices. Eating beyond level 7 will cause you to feel tired and uncomfortable and may lead to weight gain.

	1	Beyond Hungry	I have no energy. I may feel faint, irritable and eat whatever food is available.
	2	Famished	My energy level is decreasing, and I am preoccupied with hunger.
Key Decision Point	3	Hungry	I have a strong urge to eat.
Mindful Eating Zone	4	Slightly Hungry	I am beginning to think about food and feel a light urge to eat.
	5	Neutral	I have enough energy to perform tasks and feel neither hungry nor full.
	6	Satisfied	I am aware of the food in my stomach and feel entirely satisfied.
Key Decision Point	7	Full	I am full to the point that taking any more bites will cause discomfort.
	8	Uncomfortable	I feel uncomfortable. Eating more food will intensify my discomfort.
	9	Stuffed	I feel heavy, tired and bloated.
	10	Beyond Full	I have discomfort and pain. My fullness affects my ability to work and be physically active.



10 tips to avoid extreme hunger and overeating

1. **Think about why you are eating.** Are you eating because you are hungry or are you eating to soothe your emotions or to experience taste?
2. **Use the hunger scale to help you decide when to eat and when to stop eating.**
3. **Wait 20 minutes before eating a second helping or dessert.** This gives your stomach time to tell your brain it is full.
4. **Distract yourself when you want to eat for emotional reasons.** Try one of the 30 tips below.
5. **Set limits for eating when you want to taste food.** Decide on a reasonable portion and enjoy the experience. Realize that the second portion will not taste any better than the first one. You may also decide to take the food to-go and wait to eat it until you are hungry.
6. **Eat breakfast every day.** Eat breakfast at about the same time every day to create a healthy eating pattern and avoid extreme hunger by mid-morning.
7. **Eat every 4 to 5 hours.** Plan for snacks if meals are more than 4 hours apart to avoid extreme hunger. Have healthy snacks on hand in case meals are delayed and to avoid temptation.
8. **Order half-portions at restaurants, ask the waiter to put half your meal in a to-go container, or share an entrée with a friend.**
9. **Drink at least 8 (8-ounce) glasses of water a day.** Drink water with and in between meals. This habit is good for your body and prevents you from confusing thirst with hunger.
10. **Focus on the food you are eating.** Enjoy the food and eat slowly. Do not eat while watching TV, reading, doing homework, or surfing the internet as this may cause you to eat more food than your body needs.

30 things to do instead of eating

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| 1. Drink a glass of water. | 16. Walk your dog. |
| 2. Go for a walk. | 17. Take a nap. |
| 3. Chew gum. | 18. Get out of the house, such as go to the park or the mall. |
| 4. Do a puzzle, crossword puzzle, or other mind game. | 19. Do jumping jacks or run in place to get moving. |
| 5. Go to the gym. | 20. Use an adult coloring book. |
| 6. Read a book. | 21. Learn a new skill. |
| 7. Call a friend or family member. | 22. Plan a family or friend night. |
| 8. Commit to spending time on a hobby. | 23. Run errands. |
| 9. Clean a room in your house. | 24. Paint or draw. |
| 10. Make something, such as a craft or crocheted blanket. | 25. Brush your teeth. |
| 11. Listen to music or a podcast. | 26. Go to the library. |
| 12. Do your laundry. | 27. Read the newspaper. |
| 13. Play a game on your phone, such as solitaire. | 28. Wash your car. |
| 14. Start a garden or pot some plants. | 29. Organize something, such as your closet or a box of photos. |
| 15. Watch a favorite movie or TV show. | 30. Take a class to learn something new. |