

Intuitive Eating: The 10 Principles

Intuitive eating is a process-based approach that ultimately teaches patients how to have a healthy relationship with food, wherein patients become the expert of their own bodies. Patients learn how to trust their ability to meet their needs, are able to distinguish between physical and emotional feelings, and develop body wisdom.

1. Reject the diet mentality

Throw out the diet books and magazine articles that offer you false hope of losing weight quickly, easily, and permanently. Get angry at the lies that have led you to feel as if you were a failure every time a new diet stopped working and you gained back all of the weight. If you allow even one small hope to linger that a new and better diet is possibly lurking around the corner, it will keep you from staying free enough to rediscover “intuitive eating.”

2. Honor your hunger

Keep your body biologically fed with adequate energy and carbohydrates. Otherwise, you can trigger a primal drive to overeat. Once you reach the moment of excessive hunger, all intentions of moderate, conscious eating are fleeting and irrelevant. Learning to honor this first biological signal sets the stage for rebuilding trust with yourself and food.

3. Make peace with food

Call a truce, and stop the food fight! Give yourself unconditional permission to eat. If you tell yourself that you can not or should not have a particular food, it can lead to intense feelings of deprivation that build into uncontrollable cravings and, often, binge eating. When you finally “give-in” to your forbidden food, eating is experienced with such intensity, it usually results in overeating and overwhelming guilt.

4. Challenge the food police

Scream a loud “no” to thoughts in your head that declare you are “good” for eating under 1000 calories or “bad” because you ate a piece of chocolate cake. The food police monitor the unreasonable rules that dieting has created. The police station is housed deep in your psyche, and its loud speaker shouts negative barbs, hopeless phrases, and guilt-provoking indictments. Chasing the food police away is a critical step in returning to intuitive eating.

5. Respect your fullness

Listen for your body signals that tell you that you are no longer hungry. Observe the signs that show that you are comfortably full. Pause in the middle of eating a meal or a food and ask yourself:

- How does the food taste?
- What is your current fullness level?

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6. Discover the satisfaction factor

The Japanese have the wisdom to promote pleasure as one of the goals of healthy living. In our fury to stay or become thin and healthy, we often overlook one of the most basic gifts of existence—the pleasure and satisfaction that is found in the eating experience. When you eat what you really want in an environment that is inviting and conducive, the pleasure you derive is a powerful force in helping you feel satisfied and content. By providing this experience for yourself, you will find that it takes much less food to decide you have had enough.

7. Honor your feelings without using food

Find ways to comfort, nurture, distract, and resolve your issues without using food. Anxiety, loneliness, boredom, and anger are emotions we all experience throughout life. Each has its own trigger, and each has its own appeasement. Food will not fix any of these feelings. It provides comfort for the short term, distracts from the pain, or even numbs you into a food hangover. But food will not solve the problem. If anything, eating for an emotional hunger will only make you feel worse in the long run. You will ultimately have to deal with the source of the emotion, as well as the discomfort of overeating.

8. Respect your body

Accept your genetic blueprint. Just as a person with a shoe size of 8 would not expect to realistically squeeze into a size 6, it is equally as futile and uncomfortable to have the same expectation with body size. But mostly, respect your body so that you can feel better about who you are. It is hard to reject the diet mentality if you are unrealistic and overly critical about your body shape.

9. Exercise—feel the difference

Forget militant exercise. Just get active, and feel the difference. Shift your focus to how it feels to move your body, rather than the calorie-burning effect of exercise. If you focus on how you feel from working out, such as energized, it can make the difference between rolling out of bed for a brisk morning walk or hitting the snooze alarm. If when you wake up, your only goal is to lose weight, it is usually not a motivating factor in that moment of time.

10. Honor your health

Make food choices that honor your health and taste buds, while making you feel well. Remember that you do not have to eat a perfect diet to stay healthy. You will not suddenly get a nutrient deficiency or gain weight from one snack, meal, or day of eating. It is what you eat consistently over time that matters. Progress not perfection is what counts.

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Contributed by Evelyn Tribole, MS, RD, and Elyse Resch MS, RD, FADA, authors of *Intuitive Eating*, 3rd ed. New York, New York: St Martin's Press; 2003. (www.IntuitiveEating.org)