

Hunger, Cravings, and Mindful Eating

What is Physical Hunger?

Physical hunger is a strong desire for food that is biologically driven. Eating has usually not happened for several hours. You may experience feelings of emptiness, like you suddenly have no energy, or irritability.

Hunger can influence your ability to lose weight. Often, skipping meals or going too long without eating can lead to impulse eating, quick eating, and over-consumption. These eating behaviors often result in eating more total calories in the day.

You can control hunger by:

- Eating at regular intervals. Avoid skipping meals; eat even if it's something small.
- Choosing solid foods over liquids
- Starting a meal with a salad or broth-based soup
- Including protein and fiber at meals and snacks to help stay full

After surgery, your hunger and fullness may be different. You may not feel physical hunger for 3-6 months after surgery. It is important to follow the recommended meal pattern to ensure you are meeting nutrient and fluid needs. The feeling of fullness is different as well. It is often described as abdominal pressure. If you feel pain you have over done it!

<h3>Ask yourself:</h3> <p>Am I physically hungry when I eat?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>If I'm not physically hungry, why do I eat?</p> <hr/> <hr/>

What is a Craving?

An intense urge to eat a specific food even after eating a meal. How you can tell the difference between physical hunger and a craving:

Physical Hunger	Cravings
Builds gradually	Develop suddenly
Stomach pains, feelings of emptiness	Mentally imagining how a food may look, taste, and smell
Occurs several hours after a meal	Unrelated to time
Goes away when full	Persists despite fullness
Eating leads to feeling of satisfaction	Eating leads to guilt and shame

Triggers for Cravings

Cravings are triggered by something internal or external that have nothing to do with the body's need for food. Many things may trigger a craving.

Ask yourself:

What triggers my cravings?

___ Sight or smell of food

___ Activities or places

___ Seasons or holidays

___ Social Media

___ Advertisements/marketing

___ Emotions or stress

___ Psychological triggers

___ Other _____

Coping with Cravings

- **Understand what is triggering your craving.** Learn to address the trigger and not the craving. Tired? Get some rest. Bored? Find other activities to do.
- **Seek support.** Call or text a friend or family member. Tell others about your health goals. Go to support group or find support online. Talk to your health care providers.
- **Redirect your thoughts.** Visualize a peaceful scene, or sniff a non-food aroma (candles, hand lotion, eucalyptus) to reduce your thoughts about food.
- **Drink water.** Dehydration can make you feel hungry. Aim for 64+ oz water per day.
- **Eat every few hours.** Avoid skipping meals. Eat even if it's something small.
- **Engage in physical activity.** If you tend to eat mindlessly due to boredom or stress, try going for a walk instead. If your hunger is not physical, you will feel better almost instantly

Which of these strategies do I want to try?

Mindless Eating

Mindless eating is eating without a focused awareness of what you are consuming, or how much is being eaten. Many things can influence mindless eating such as the location of where you eat, size of your dinnerware, distractions, visibility of food, and distance from food.

Mindfulness

<p>Ask yourself:</p> <p>What does it mean to be mindful?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Mindfulness is a non-judgmental awareness of your actions, thoughts and feelings. Being mindful means to be aware of the present moment rather than thinking about the future or dwelling on the past. You can be mindful of your thoughts, physical sensations, and emotions.

Mindful Eating

Mindfulness is a powerful tool that you can use to help manage your weight. Mindful eating increases your awareness of the eating process, your sensations of hunger and fullness, your thoughts and feelings about food, what you eat, and how much you eat. This can lead to better satisfaction with meals, reduced intake and weight loss.

<p>Ask yourself:</p>	
	(circle)
Do you regularly plan your meals?	Yes No
Do you set aside time for your meals?	Yes No
Do you snack and graze on available foods?	Yes No
Do you eat quickly?	Yes No

Mindful Eating Techniques

- **Make eating an experience.** Avoid eating on the go. Sit down to a meal and make eating the only activity. Tune out distractions. Create a relaxing environment. Enjoy your meal!
- **Mindful Bite.** Look at your food before you start eating. Once the food is in your mouth, clear your hands. Put silverware or remaining food down. Simply chew and pay attention; keep chewing until the food is uniformly smooth. After you swallow, pause for a few seconds before you take another bite
- **Rate your hunger.** Start a meal when you feel hungry, but don't let yourself get the point where you are starving or ravenous. On a scale of 1-10, stay between a 4-7 to help you make healthy food choices and control portions.
- **Rate your awareness.** Are you paying attention in the moment? Or are you "zoned out?"
- **Slow down the pace of your meal.** Take a few breaths before you start eating. Eat with your non-dominant hand, use chopsticks, or set a timer for 20 minutes.
- **Leave food on your plate when you are full.**
- **Keep healthier foods out where you can see them.** In front of the fridge or cabinet.
- **Keep less healthy foods "out of sight".** Off counters and desks
- **Manage your stress.** Try relaxation and breathing techniques. Go for a walk. Find a healthy way to "unwind" at the end of the day. Enjoy your favorite activities.

Mindful Weight Loss

Find the right balance of how often to weigh yourself. Learn to think holistically about your body. Remember the scale only focuses on one aspect of your body. Focus on other indicators of success besides the number on the scale.