

# make friends with hunger

Simple  
strategies for  
understanding  
when and how  
much to eat

Toward the end of graduate school Lindsey Frumovitz finally named her relationship with food. She lived alone for the first time, with nowhere to hide. “I’d call myself a casual bulimic, for lack of a better phrase,” she says.

Frumovitz turned to registered dietician Elyse Resch and reconnected with her body’s natural hunger cues. Resch and Evelyn Tribole, co-authors of *Intuitive Eating* (Second edition, St. Martin’s Press, 2003), teach women to change poor eating habits—either under or overeating. “It’s about learning to be an expert of your body,” Tribole says.

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## the power of hunger

Hunger's impact looms large. When ignored, hunger causes moodiness, lowers concentration and leads to food preoccupation up to 65 percent of waking time. Chronic hunger, warns Frances Berg, licensed nutritionist and author of *Women Afraid to Eat* (Healthy Weight Network, 2000), keeps women from achieving their full potential in personal, family and career pursuits.

Frumovitz, 33, now a personal trainer in Marina del Rey, Calif., agrees. She remembers losing entire months to depression and bulimia. Today, the happily married, three-time marathon finisher weighs 20 pounds less than her bulimic days and says, "There are so many things I can do now that I've let go of the depression and bulimia due to my relationship with food. I can focus on real goals that are more fulfilling, rather than that number on the scale or how little I can eat today."

That's why it's time to make friends with hunger, the ultimate form of women's intuition. Reclaiming hunger feeds the body and frees the mind for more important matters. Yet, many of us regularly subvert or stymie hunger because we're too busy or too afraid to eat. We've literally forgotten how being either hungry or full feels. Simple strategies, however, uncover your body's innate wisdom and uncomplicate food decisions.

## who's hungry?

Start by cueing into your body's built-in hunger alerts. Tune out external pressures from commercials, super-sized portions and well-meaning family and friends—not to mention emotions that sometimes cause us to turn to food. For this reason, Tribble



teaches women to clear their minds before eating. She recommends taking a two-minute break to breathe deeply and listen to your body.

Use these quiet moments to look for clear hunger signals such as hollowness in the stomach or lightness in the head. Sometimes you'll notice growling or what Kay Stearns

Bruening, assistant professor of nutrition at Syracuse University, calls "rumbly in the tumbly." Chronic dieters need such obvious physical cues to recognize hunger at first. Growling is an important, albeit relatively late-stage cue. "Once they learn that," Bruening says, "then they might be attune to early, more subtle signs."

Illness or stress can blunt stomach-centered signals, and for some, the growling never comes. In these cases, look for less obvious hunger cues, including:

- W Having difficulty concentrating
- W Feeling mentally foggy
- W Being irritable
- W Feeling sleepy
- W Thinking about food

Once you discover how your hunger feels, grade it using the bottom half of a 10-point scale:

- 1 Ravenous
- 2 Painfully hungry
- 3 Quite hungry
- 4 Hungry
- 5 Neither hungry, nor full



## who to trust?

Rather than outline a nutritional dogma with rigid rules, eating intuitively relies on three assumptions:

- W You eat a well-balanced diet.
- W You get regular moderate exercise.
- W Sometimes you'll eat more than you need, which is fine as long as you don't do it every day.

Depending on your current relationship with food, connecting with your hunger may take a month, six months or a year. "It's about getting in touch with your body, and trusting it," Tribole says. "After dieting so much, women don't trust themselves with food and that just takes some time." ©

# 10 tips for managing hunger

- 1 Eat when you're mildly hungry.** Wait until you're ravenous, and you may eat too much before your body signals it's full.
- 2 Eat what you love, even once-forbidden foods.** By satisfying cravings, you'll likely eat less and avoid binges caused by feeling deprived.
- 3 Practice gentle nutrition over time.** A single snack or one day with too much chocolate doesn't ruin healthy eating.
- 4 Keep a food journal of what tastes good to you.** You may not even like foods with mythical appeal.
- 5 Create an enjoyable eating environment.** Pleasing all of your senses fosters contentment that can prevent overeating.
- 6 Find constructive ways to deal with emotions and stress.** Food solves only one problem—hunger.
- 7 Watch portion sizes, especially when eating out.** Many restaurant entrées are two or more portions and can total 1,000 calories or more. Clean your plate, and you're likely overeating.
- 8 Find ways to love and be loved without using food.** In many cultures, food equals love, but there are other ways to be loving.
- 9 Drink beverages without calories or caffeine throughout the day.** A low-level influx of sugar and stimulants dulls hunger cues.
- 10 Thirst is not hunger.** Quell it with water—not caloric beverages—especially in the heat.

Tribole advises women to eat when they feel a level three or four hunger. "A gentle hunger is where you can feel it in your body, are looking forward to eating," she explains, "but you won't kill someone that gets between you and your food."

Regular meals also spur recognizable hunger cues. Berg says that the body adjusts to schedules and will more likely feel hungry at specific times.

## full yet?

Bruening admits that eating only when you're hungry is easier than stopping when you're full. "The old story is that it takes your brain 15 to 20 minutes to know that you're full," she says. "I've never seen the data, but I believe it's true."

Therefore, eat slowly, giving the body time to generate signs of fullness, and measure satisfaction using the remainder of the 10-point scale:

- 6 Satisfied
- 7 Full
- 8 Really full
- 9 Stuffed
- 10 Painfully full

Frumovitz most often stops eating when she reaches a five. Sometimes she hits a seven or higher but says that's rare and uncomfortable.

For the hunger scale to work, keep distractions to a minimum. No working, answering e-mails, reading or watching TV. While multi-tasking, there's no telling how many excess calories can cross your lips. Food is social, and Bruening says that talking to others is the only good mealtime activity. Tribole blames our Puritanical work ethic for driving a hectic pace, with food literally "along for the ride."

## biological versus emotional hunger

We eat for physical, social and emotional reasons. While gauging when and how much to eat, emotional hunger can skew the results. To distinguish biological hunger from emotional hunger, ask yourself three questions:

- W Am I truly hungry?
- W If not, then what am I feeling?
- W How can I deal with this feeling?

For example, what can you do to calm down when stressed, get stimulation when bored or find comfort when upset?

