

Easing into Gentle Nutrition

When many people hear about intuitive eating, they think it means eating whatever, whenever, and does not matter what it is. However, we still want to make sure we are properly nourishing our body and giving it all the nutrients, it needs. This is the last principle of intuitive eating: gentle nutrition.

What is Gentle Nutrition?

Think of gentle nutrition as a practice of self-care. As we begin the practice of intuitive eating, we want to incorporate foods that are satisfying but also meet our nutrient requirements. We want a good balance of foods that are rich in vitamins and minerals while still enjoying fun foods. By doing so, we honor both our physical and mental health.

How to Begin Implementing Gentle Nutrition

When you first begin intuitive eating and eliminate food rules, you may find yourself eating more of those “fun” foods. This is totally okay and expected when you may not have had these foods in a long time. However, as you begin eating these foods more, you might notice your body giving you signals that it needs some of those more nutrient dense foods. This is when we can begin implementing gentle nutrition. As you begin:

1. **Listen to your body.** Pay attention to how certain foods make you feel. Do you feel energized or sluggish? How do certain foods sit in your stomach? A big part of intuitive eating is respecting your body. While acknowledging mental cravings can be important, it is equally important to acknowledge how your body physically feels. Some days, you may be willing to sacrifice some physical discomfort for your favorite foods. Other days you may not want to feel more energized and upbeat after a meal. Finding this balance between foods that make you feel good emotionally and foods that make you feel good physically can be difficult at first. Have compassion for yourself.
2. **Release control.** When implementing this practice, we want to eliminate any form of self-control. We don't want to begin opting for nutrient dense foods over our fun foods with the intention of losing weight or changing our appearance in any way. Instead, we should be doing so because we care about adequately nourishing our bodies and want to feel good and healthy.
3. **Variety is key.** Ensuring you have a variety of foods each day will help you practice gentle nutrition. Every single food serves a necessary purpose in our body, whether it be physical or mental. We want to ensure all our needs are met. When thinking about what foods sound good, also ask yourself what foods or nutrients you haven't been eating much of lately. How can you incorporate these in a way that also satisfies your mental craving? This will take some time and adjusting to get used to, but the more you practice listening to your body, the easier it will become.

Examples of Gentle Nutrition

Now that we have a general understanding of gentle nutrition and how to start the practice, let's look at some examples of what gentle nutrition might look like.

- Thinking about all nutrients when preparing a meal and incorporating carbohydrates, protein, fats, vitamins, and minerals.
- Adding in protein powder or Greek yogurt to your morning smoothies to help keep you full and satisfied.
- Having a side of veggies with your lunch to incorporate more variety.

- Choosing whole wheat bread over white bread for more vitamins, minerals, and fiber to keep you satisfied and full.
- Having a banana and peanut butter as a snack instead of candy because you want to feel more energized and fuller.
- Increasing/decreasing portion sizes at meals if you find you are not feeling satisfied or are usually overly full.
- Choosing a salad or vegetable as your side because you haven't been eating many vegetables lately and notice your body feeling sluggish.
- Drinking water instead of soda because you feel dehydrated and know your body needs water to function properly.

Take Good Care of Yourself

With gentle nutrition we want to make sure we are honoring our bodies on every level. Get to know your body and its signals. Honor them with care. Have compassion with yourself as this practice takes time. Remember this is your body and your needs. Find out what gentle nutrition looks like for you and take good care.