

# Beginning to Eat Intuitively

Are you tired of diet culture's insane food rules? Want to get more in touch with your body and learn to enjoy your favorite foods once again? By learning the practice of intuitive eating, you can make peace with food and your body while breaking free from diet culture.

## What is Intuitive Eating?

Let me preface by saying, Intuitive Eating IS NOT A DIET. An evidence-based practice developed in 1995 by two dietitians, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, Intuitive Eating consists of ten principles that allow one to listen to the body's messages and honor them to meet physical and psychological needs.

As infants, we cried when we were hungry, then ate until we were satisfied. Somewhere along the way, we received messages that praised us for ignoring our bodies. Over time as we continuously ignore these signals, it can become more difficult to understand our body's needs. These signals are indicators of our overall health status and can be detrimental when ignored for too long. Coming back in touch with these signals is not out of reach. Through the practice of intuitive eating, we can relearn hunger, fullness, and satisfactory cues. We can learn what amounts of food are needed for our body, reach a level of health where we feel the most energized and strong, and find food freedom.

## What are the Ten Principles?

1. Reject the Diet Mentality
2. Honor Your Hunger
3. Make Peace with Food
4. Challenge the Food Police
5. Respect Your Fullness
6. Discover the Satisfaction Factor
7. Honor Your Feelings without Using Food
8. Respect Your Body
9. Exercise—Feel the Difference
10. Honor Your Health with Gentle Nutrition

## Where Do I Start?

Letting go of food rules learned by diet culture can be scary and intimidating. Working with a registered dietitian who specializes in intuitive eating can provide the support needed to help you begin this journey and challenge any obstacles that may arise. Ultimately, coming back to the ten principles will help to get you started. These principles do not serve as rules, but rather as guides to help you through this practice.

## What Does Applying the Principles Look Like?

Rejecting the diet mentality can be difficult for those of us that have heard these messages for years. Diets give us the message that we need to lose weight. Intuitive eating tells us that our bodies will find a healthy weight on their own when we honor them. So, what does honoring our bodies look like? Begin looking for signals like low

energy, shakiness, a growling stomach, headaches, trouble focusing. These are all indicators that we are hungry. When we start to feel these things, we should honor our body, respond to hunger, and nourish.

When we are looking to nourish our body ask ourselves these questions:

“What food sounds good right now?”

“Something hot or something cold?”

“Something sweet or something savory?”

“Will this food provide me with adequate nutrition to feel physically full and satisfied emotionally?”

These questions will help us make peace with food and challenge the food police. There are no “good” foods or “bad” foods. All foods can fit to meet our body’s needs. Yes, that includes your favorite ice cream or pizza from your local Italian restaurant. When we start to include these foods that diet culture has told us are “forbidden,” we find that we begin to crave them less and less. Intuitive eating can help us to eliminate the pedestal we may place foods on and see all foods as having a benefit.

A common misconception with intuitive eating is that “you eat whatever you want, whenever you want.” However, the last principle focuses on gentle nutrition. When we make food choices, we still want to be gentle with our bodies and make choices that honor our physical health too. It is still important to incorporate all food groups to meet our body’s various needs. This includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fats, protein, and dairy in addition to all your other favorite foods.

Diet culture has told us that feeling hungry is bad. However, this is just simply our body telling us we need more energy. When we ignore our hunger over periods of time, it can disrupt our body’s normal hunger and fullness cues. Integrating the practice of intuitive eating will help bring these signals back. As we learn to look for hunger signals, we can also learn fullness signals. Take your time while eating, enjoying the flavors and textures of each bite. Check in with your body throughout the meal. Does your stomach feel full? Do you feel satisfied?

It is also important to recognize that being satisfied is different from feeling physically full. Food serves as more than just a substance of nourishment. It is an aspect of our social lives and a big part of many family traditions and gatherings. It tastes good and brings us pleasure. Meeting our body’s psychological needs when it comes to food indicates satisfaction.

Before and after a meal, it can be good to check in with the hunger and fullness scale to really tap into your body. Notice how certain foods make you feel after eating them. Some may make you more full than others. Each time you do this, you learn more about your body and what satisfies you.

## The Hunger Scale



Lastly, let's look at the principle that focuses on exercise. Intuitive eating involves using exercise as a way of joyful movement. Learn what type of exercise you enjoy and what you do not, rather than doing exercises diet culture says you should do. Exercise should make you feel energized, uplifted, happy, and confident. This can be dancing, yoga, walking, weightlifting, roller skating, the list goes on. Whatever it is, it should be fun and easy to incorporate into your daily schedule.

### It Takes Time

The practice of Intuitive Eating is not something you can pick up overnight. It takes time to learn your body. There will be times when you eat past fullness. Times where you go too long without eating and feel extreme hunger. Be gentle and compassionate with yourself. These are all things that happen as a part of our normal lives. Just look at what you can learn from these experiences and share any feedback with your dietitian if you choose to work with one to help you better prepare for future circumstances. Making small steps to releasing diet culture will feel liberating and taking the time to read this brings you one step closer to food freedom. Enjoy the process of learning your body and making peace with food.

### The Intuitive Eating Book

If you are interested in learning more about the practice of Intuitive Eating from the dietitians who discovered the practice, look into reading the latest edition or checking out their website <https://www.intuitiveeating.org>.