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Intuitive Eating is eating when, what and as much as you want by listening to your inner wisdom, trusting your body's signals and honouring your body's needs. You knew how to eat intuitively when you were born and then you learned lots of "rules" about eating. Dieting and other factors may have led you to develop patterns of compulsive eating or yo-yo dieting. Intuitive Eating can be re-learned.

Eating When You Want

Eating intuitively is eating only when you are hungry: only when your body wants food.

So many factors teach us that we should eat when someone else, or the clock, says it's time. When we diet, we look to outside authorities to tell us when to eat. When we get hungry when it isn't the right time, we choose not to eat, or we eat and feel guilty.

You may have learned that food is so much more than fuel for your body. It can be a pain killer. If you feel sad, angry, disappointed, lonely, anxious or afraid, food can make that pain go away. But food doesn't really make the pain go away. It merely distracts you for awhile. The pain goes deep inside you where it gives birth to even more pain - the pain of eating compulsively, not being in control and of refusing yourself the food you believe you should be eating. Food can also be a way to celebrate: special foods for special occasions. It can be a way to nurture yourself; a way to treat yourself when you haven't got the time or energy to really take care of yourself; a way to compensate when you are too afraid to reach out for help or when you believe you don't deserve it.

Eating What You Want

When you eat intuitively, you eat what will make your body feel good.

Early training and dieting teaches us that if we allowed ourselves to have the food we want, we would eat only forbidden foods. Foods that we can have only if we are "good", only on special occasions and only if we eat our vegetables first. These are the foods you can have only when you aren't on a diet, when you are your perfect weight.

These rules serve only to make us crave these foods more. These foods become very special and, when we do allow ourselves to have them, we eat as much as we can because we don't know when we will get them, again.

My Mom made delicious shortbread once a year at Christmas time. It was very special, limited in quantity and doled out very carefully. I ate my share whenever it was offered whether I really wanted it or not. No matter how much there was, it was never enough. At some point in my thirties I realized that, if I wanted to, I could make shortbread in February or June or whenever I wanted. Then I didn't have to eat it all in December. What surprised me was that only twice in the years since that realization have I actually made shortbread during the year. All I needed to know was that I actually had that choice.

Eating what you want doesn't mean that nutrition is not important. When you start paying attention to your body's signals and start taking care of yourself, you become willing to give your body what will help it feel good and will crave the foods that help it feel that way. You will find that the foods you crave are the ones that are good for your body.

Eating As Much As You Want

When you eat intuitively, you want just the right amount of food to satisfy physiological hunger.

Early training often teaches us that we must clean our plates. Early experience may also have taught you that if don't take it now, it probably won't be there later. Growing up in a family of eight, I learned both these rules. I came to expect that there was a pretty good chance there wouldn't be enough for seconds, so I took more than I needed, but never enough to appear greedy. Paired with the "clean-plate" rule, this behaviour often meant that I ate more than I wanted to. I didn't feel satisfied because I hadn't taken as much as I really wanted.

When you pay attention to your body as you are eating, you will hear a little sigh or feel the signal that says "That's just enough". If you start eating when you aren't hungry, the signal won't be there since your body didn't really want food. If you are distracted by outside happenings or by your own thoughts, you will miss the signal.

Eating intuitively will allow you to achieve your ideal weight. Learning, or rather, re-learning to eat intuitively is a process that takes time and patience for most. If you choose to follow this path, be gentle with yourself; forgive yourself for misjudging or ignoring signals and give yourself enough of a chance to change.

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