

Hunger Cues

Upon arrival in this world, healthy infants have an innate ability to eat exactly what they need. They eat only when they are hungry, and refuse food when they are satisfied. They recognize their bodies hunger cues, which are natural indicators of hunger and fullness. Somewhere along the line they stop listening to their hunger cues, probably starting very early in life. Children are expected to clean their plates and are often bribed to do so with dessert. While parents mean well, they are teaching their children to ignore signals of fullness.



It takes a very conscious effort to recognize hunger cues after years of being taught to ignore them. Studies have shown that if we listen to our body's signals about hunger, fullness, and appetite, we will know better when to stop eating. And weight loss is easier when you listen to what your body is telling you.

Different types of hunger



To regain the ability to eat only when you are hungry, you must understand that not all hunger is physical. Today, while almost no one eats only when they are physically hungry, many people eat when they are psychologically hungry. You may be enticed by a succulent hamburger in an advertisement on television and start to think you're hungry. You may eat on schedule whether you feel hungry or not. You may be bored, tired, sad, happy or nervous. These are all types of psychological hunger.

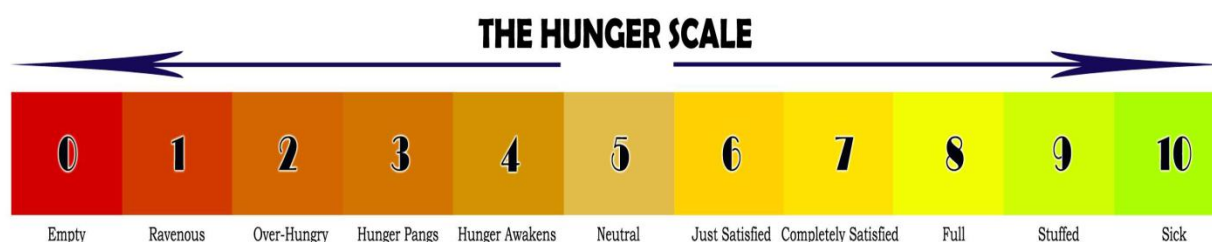
Psychological vs. physical hunger cues

The first step in learning to read your hunger cues is recognizing the difference between your psychological and physical hunger. To most people, the two are indistinguishable. Based on when and what you ate last, you may be able to guess if you should be physically hungry. If you have recently eaten and still feel hungry, first stop and ask yourself if you are experiencing any of the following emotions, which often trigger psychological hunger:

- Anger
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Loneliness
- Insecurity
- Guilt
- Jealousy
- Happiness
- Anxiety
- Disappointment
- Grief
- Procrastination
- Fear
- Boredom

Recognize your overeating patterns

Referring to the hunger scale will help you listen to your body. The goal is to start eating when you have the beginning signals of hunger (Level 4) and stop when you are comfortably full (Level 6), but do not feel as if you have overeaten. You may find that you often put off eating until you are so hungry you are unable to concentrate (Level 2), or have serious hunger pains (Level 1) at which point you eat so ravenously that, before realizing you are satisfied, you have overeaten. Or perhaps at a party you continue to eat when you are already uncomfortably full (Level 8). Simply noticing these trends will help you make better choices next time.



Here are some other ways to help

- **Keep a journal.** Write down not what you are eating but how you are feeling when you eat.
- **Don't sit down for a meal starving.** You can help curb your appetite by drinking water or sipping herbal tea before a meal.
- **Take 20.** Twenty minutes is the magic number because it takes 20 minutes for the stomach to send signals to the brain to let it know you are eating.

Quick tips for slower eating:

- **Have water with your meal and take a sip before each bite.**
 - **Put down your utensils in between bites.**
 - **Count your chews. 15-20 times.**

