



## What You Need to Know to Lose Weight Without Dieting

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If your commitment to eat right, exercise, and lose weight seems to always lose its steam, you are not alone! Weight problems are not just about *what* you are eating, but *why* you are eating in the first place.

To see what I mean, ask yourself these questions. Do you think about food and eating more than you think you should? Do you feel guilty when you eat certain foods? Do you have trouble passing up tempting food even if you aren't hungry? Are you a star member of the "clean plate club"? Do you often eat when you are bored, stressed, lonely, or angry? Do you eat differently in private than you do in public? Do you fluctuate between dieting and eating too much?

If you answered yes to most of these questions, you have probably discovered that dieting hasn't really solved the problem. To help you understand why, let's take a look at three different eating styles: Over Eating, Restrictive Eating, and Instinctive Eating.

In "Over Eating" people eat because it is mealtime or because something looks good - whether they are hungry or not. They may also eat to distract themselves or cope with stress and emotions. They may reward, comfort, or entertain themselves with food. Their weight tends to go up and down depending on whether they are off or on their diet.

In "Restrictive Eating," a person controls his or her weight by dieting. They decide when, what, and how much to eat based on the rules of the latest diet they are following. Since diet rules are always changing, they sometimes feel confused about what they should eat. They think of food as either "good" or "bad" - and they think of themselves as good or bad, depending on what they ate.

Now think about someone who doesn't struggle with his or her weight. If you are having trouble thinking of someone like that, think of a baby or a young child. I call this "Instinctive Eating." These people just seem to know when, what, and how much food they need. When their body needs fuel, they get hungry, triggering an urge to eat. They simply stop eating when their hunger is satisfied. Most of them really like to eat and seem to be able to eat whatever they want. However they will turn down even delicious food if they aren't hungry.

They tend to maintain their weight within a narrow range, apparently without a lot of effort.

The real difference between these styles is that with Instinctive Eating, *hunger* determines when, what, and how much to eat, while Over Eating is more likely a response to environmental and emotional cues. On the other hand, in Restrictive Eating, the focus is on what they should and shouldn't eat instead of what their body tells them to do.

You might believe that a people who eat instinctively have been blessed with willpower and a great metabolism. But the truth is, we were all born Instinctive Eaters but many of us “unlearned” our natural ability to know how much to eat. The good news is that you can relearn those skills if you are willing. I did! Here are some important steps to get you started.

1. Let go of the idea that there is a perfect diet that will finally solve your problems. The answer lies within you.
2. Whenever you have an urge to eat, instead of focusing on the food, first ask yourself, “Am I hungry?” Remember that hunger is a *physical* feeling. It is not the same thing as appetite, cravings, or the desire to eat.
3. If you are hungry, try to make the best possible choice you can that will satisfy your body *and* your soul. Keeping tasty, healthy food on hand makes this step easier.
4. Remember that there are no “good” or “bad” foods. You are less likely to overeat certain foods if you know that you can have them again when you really want them.
5. Stop eating when the hunger is gone but before you feel full, even if there is food left.
6. If you are not hungry, ask yourself what else might have triggered your urge to eat. Was there an environmental or emotional trigger?
7. If it was an environmental trigger, ask yourself what you could do to reduce the trigger or distract yourself from it. For instance, could you put the candy dish out of sight or could you do something else for a while until you are actually hungry?
8. If it was an emotional trigger, ask yourself what you could do to better cope with that emotion. For instance, if stress triggered your urge to eat, could you try a relaxation exercise instead?

9. Don't expect yourself to be perfect. Even Instinctive Eaters occasionally overeat.

10. Live an active lifestyle – more about this important step in another article!

This process is *simple* – but it is not always *easy*. Learning new skills takes time and practice. The Am I Hungry? Multidimensional Weight Management System can show you how!

By following the Am I Hungry? system, you will see that eating to satisfy hunger is pleasurable and that it is good to eat foods that you enjoy. You will find that meeting your other needs in appropriate ways will bring balance and joy to your life. You *can* learn to balance eating for health with eating for pleasure. Your efforts are well worth it when you develop lifelong skills and a healthier lifestyle!

*Michelle May, M.D., a Board Certified Family Physician, developed the Am I Hungry?, Multidimensional Weight System (www.AmIHungry.com). She has served as president of the Arizona Academy of Family Physicians and has been active in the American Academy of Family Physicians, the Arizona Medical Association, and many other professional and community organizations. She writes and speaks widely on healthy approaches to weight management. Contact her at MMay@AmIHungry.com or 480 704-7811.*