



Am I Hungry?
Book Excerpt:
All Foods Fit

www.AmIHungry.com

The diet message is loud and clear: “You are out of control so you need to follow our rules.” The “expert” or “authority” may recommend counting calories, exchanges, points, grams, or ounces. The diet may require that you eat pre-packaged food or meal replacements. There may be strict meal plans or complicated diets to follow. Some methods even eliminate entire food groups – or solid food all together. Diets often tell you that there are forbidden foods or magical food combinations, and they often impose food rules that most people do not, cannot, or should not follow for very long. And of course, the rules change frequently! When they can’t stick to the rules, some dieters will resort to appetite suppressants to help “control” their hunger or dangerous “thermogenics” to boost metabolism. Some people opt for drastic stomach bypass surgery as a method of forcing changes in their eating behavior.

According to a growing “anti-diet” movement, diets don’t work because they are an “external authority” that teaches the dieter to disregard their own “internal authority.” Diet messages tell you that you must learn to control yourself, and control your appetite, in order to gain control over your weight. You must follow the latest expert’s rules about when, what, and how much to eat. Some diets don’t let you eat even if you are hungry (“you are allowed to eat only 1400 calories per day”) or make you eat when you are not (“eat six small meals each day”). The end result is that dieting completely separates you from your own body’s cues of hunger and satiety.

Diets force you to disconnect from your body’s instinctive need to feed itself. This isn’t natural. Most people feel that it is a constant struggle to follow the rules, leading to a painful relationship with food. It is a proven concept that people do more of what brings them pleasure and strive to avoid what brings them pain. Since dieting often leads to pain and disappointment, it is not an effective long-term solution to weight management or optimal health.

Deprivation Can Lead to Cravings

But it is not just your body that rebels when you diet. Your mind rebels against strict dieting too. This happens because most diets are based on limiting various foods in one way or another. When certain foods are forbidden, you begin to place special value on them. Remember how you craved rich, creamy peanut butter when you weren’t supposed to eat fat, or piping hot bread when you were on a low carbohydrate diet? When food is restricted, you begin to feel deprived. These feelings of deprivation can cause powerful cravings. When you finally give in to the cravings for these “bad” foods, you may feel guilty and out of control. You may give up the diet and even binge on the foods you’ve been missing. Of course, most dieters blame themselves when the diet fails, but in reality, dieting itself is to blame.

“Good” Fuel, “Bad” Fuel

Fueling your body is the natural response to hunger. However, when you are trying to lose weight, you may experience conflict between what comes naturally, and what you are think you are supposed to do. When you stand in front of your open refrigerator at home, what goes through your mind? “I shouldn’t eat that; it is too fattening.” “Hmmm. I wonder how many carbs that has?” “I guess I should eat this because it is healthy, but I really want something else.” “Boy, I wish I was allowed to eat that!”

This “good” food, “bad” food approach is common and may be contributing to your struggle with eating and weight. To make matters worse, many people feel confused about what they are “supposed” to eat since the rules seem to change frequently. People label foods to help them make healthier choices, but it takes a lot of effort to avoid all of the “bad” foods and consume only the “good” ones. The truth is that all foods are comprised of varying amounts of nutrients and calories that are required for daily living. Some foods are more nutritionally beneficial than others – but that doesn’t justify labeling them as “good” or “bad.” That kind of black and white thinking does not help you move any closer to optimal health.

All Foods Fit

The truth is, all foods fit. Think about people who eat “instinctively,” as we discussed in Chapter 1. One distinguishing feature is that they eat whatever they want – when they are hungry. They don’t obsess or worry about food. They may choose certain foods because they have learned about their health benefits, but they don’t deprive themselves of foods that they find pleasurable. As a result, they are less likely to overeat their “fun” foods since they know they can have them anytime they want.

At this point, you may feel that if you let go of all the diet rules, you will only crave your “forbidden” foods. That may happen at first, but as you transform yourself into an instinctive eater and certain foods are no longer forbidden, your cravings for them will diminish. So, when you are hungry, instead of turning to a long list of restricted and allowed foods, keep in mind that all foods fit!

As you begin working through your food cravings and enjoying your favorite foods again, there are three simple but essential principles for effectively implementing the “all foods fit” approach: Balance, Variety, and Moderation.

Ken’s experience provides us with a good example of why these are important.

Ken used to be a technician and brought his lunch to work most of the time. When he got a new job in sales, his position became more stressful and entailed a lot of business entertaining and meetings over lunch. His diet shifted to large portion, high fat restaurant meals and, as

a result, he gained twenty pounds in the first year. He decided to try a high protein, low carbohydrate diet. It was easy at first since he could eat as much steak, bacon and eggs as he liked and he lost twelve pounds. However, he started missing many of the foods that were no longer allowed in his diet like pasta and fruit. He knew that some of those foods had been a source of pleasure for him and some were important for his health. He eventually found that he couldn't – and probably shouldn't, keep himself from eating all of those foods. Unfortunately, when he went back to his previous eating habits he regained all of the weight he had lost.

Principle One: Balance

“Balance” refers to the importance of providing your body with all of its necessary nutrients but as Ken’s experience shows, “balance” refers not only to balancing your intake of all of the important nutrients, but it also refers to balancing eating for health with eating for pleasure. Whether he was on or off his diet, Ken was out of balance in both respects!

Principle Two: Variety

“Variety” refers to eating an assortment of different foods. As Ken discovered, eating the same foods all of the time leads to monotony. This was not only boring, but it did not meet all of his nutritional requirements. In fact, it is important not only to eat from all of the different food groups, but also to eat a mixture of foods within each group since no single food has everything you need. Variety in eating promotes overall health and enjoyment.

Principle Three: Moderation

“Moderation” refers to portion sizes but should not be confused with weighing and measuring food. These extreme methods are not necessary. The best way to determine if you have had enough is to listen to your cues of hunger and satiety. Many people don’t listen to these cues even when they are dieting. They continue to overeat the foods that are allowed on their diet, so when the diet is over, they are still overeaters, just as Ken was. However, when your goal is to feel comfortable after eating, you are more likely to eat in moderation!

This excerpt is from Am I Hungry? by Michelle May, M.D. This material is based on the Am I Hungry? Multidimensional Weight Management System; more information is available at www.AmIHungry.com. Dr. May is a Board Certified Family Physician who writes and speaks widely on healthy approaches to weight management. Contact her at MMay@AmIHungry.com or 480 704-7811.