

Hunger and Fullness Signals

Our bodies can give us important signals telling us when and how much to eat. This handout has information about our hunger and fullness signals. Listening to these signals can help you get the amount of food you need.

What are hunger and fullness?

- Hunger happens when our body needs food. Your stomach may growl. If you're very hungry, you may feel weak, dizzy, or irritable. These signals remind us to eat.
- Fullness is the relief we feel when hunger goes away. It reminds us to stop eating.
- Hunger and fullness signals vary from person to person and from day to day.
- It can take time and practice to listen to your body's signals.

What can change my hunger and fullness signals?

Certain things may increase or reduce body signals:

- Eating more food than your body needs.
- Eating less food than your body needs, which can cause cravings or overeating.
- Skipping meals or going for long periods of time without eating.
- Certain mental or physical illnesses or medicines.
- Strong feelings.

What is emotional eating?

Emotional eating means eating to manage feelings instead of eating to end hunger. Some emotional eating is normal, but it can be a problem if you eat more than you want or need.

Signs of emotional eating include:

- eating until uncomfortably full
- having sudden food cravings
- eating when upset or to feel happy
- eating impulsively

Tips for managing hunger and fullness

There are many ways to manage hunger and fullness:

- Space what you eat over the day, such as eating 3 meals with snacks as needed.
- Let yourself feel some hunger between meals; this is normal.
- If you feel less hungry at a meal, try taking smaller portions.
- It's okay to leave some food on your plate. If this bothers you, try taking smaller portions.
- If you tend to eat past fullness, try taking smaller portions and eating more slowly.
- Eat with fewer distractions. Notice how your food tastes during your meal.
- Choose foods you enjoy. Eat portions that leave you feeling satisfied and comfortable after eating.

More support

Talk to your healthcare provider if you:

- tend to eat until extremely full
- feel out of control around food
- feel guilty after eating
- have concerns about other things that may interfere with hunger and fullness signals (for example, medicines you take)

How can I learn more?

A hunger and fullness scale can help you listen to your body's signals and make you more aware of why you are eating.

- It can help you detect the difference between eating for hunger and eating more than you want or need for emotional reasons.
- It can also help you detect when you're eating less than you need to feel comfortable or satisfied.

There is a hunger and fullness scale on the next page. You can make copies of the scale to write on.

Hunger and fullness scale

Before you eat your meal or snack, decide where you would place yourself on the scale below. During and after eating do the same thing. The numbers you choose at any one time do not mean your eating is right or wrong.

| Before eating | During or after eating |
|--|--|
| Aim to start eating around a 3 to 4 when hunger starts. | Consider stopping around a 5 to 6 (satisfied, comfortable). |
| Try to limit extreme hunger (around a 1 to 2) to avoid overeating. | Try to limit fullness getting to an 8 to 10 (extremely uncomfortable and full). |



At first, it can be hard to detect and understand your body signals. Answering the questions below may be helpful. There is space to write your own notes.

| Questions | Notes |
|--|-------|
| How can you tell when you first start feeling hungry? As you get hungrier? | |
| What happens if you wait too long to eat? | |
| How can you tell when you first start feeling full? | |
| What does it feel like to be satisfied and comfortable? | |
| What does it feel like to be comfortably full? Do you feel satisfied? | |
| If you eat until you are extremely full, what do you feel? | |
| Do you eat when you're not hungry? What do you notice about your feelings or what's happening in your life? | |
| What things seem to affect your body signals from day to day? | |
| Do you see any patterns, such as the amount of time between eating? How is this affected by what or how much you've eaten? | |