

Appetite Control 101

Get Yours Under Control



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Introduction

According to the [Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion](#), the average American should be eating between 1,600 and 3,000 calories a day to maintain a healthy weight. Though, the exact number of calories your body needs will depend on factors like your physical activity level, basal metabolic rate (BMR), age, gender, and bodyweight. But the problem is that Americans don't eat because they *have* to — most people will eat because they *want* to.

The words “appetite” and “hunger” are often used interchangeably, but there is a significant difference between the two terms. *Hunger* occurs when your body signals to your mind that you need nourishment to survive, such as when your blood glucose levels drop. *Appetite* describes the desire to eat, whether you're snacking on potato chips because you felt a craving or eating a large meal to cope with emotional stress.

A good portion of maintaining your physical (and sometimes your mental health) depends on being able to control your appetite effectively. In this report, we'll be reviewing the physiology of hunger, the different types of hunger, methods of controlling your appetite, and why it's essential to keep your desire to eat under control.

Real Hunger 101 - Physiology Of Hunger

After you consume a meal, your gastrointestinal tract will push the chewed-up food, known as a “bolus,” through your digestive system. The food will exit your stomach and then proceed to the small intestine and the large intestine as enzymes continue to break the food down.

A few hours after your last meal exits your stomach, your blood sugar and insulin levels will drop. You may notice that your stomach begins to “growl” or “rumble,” a sign of looming hunger.

The low blood sugar and insulin levels will trigger the body to release the hunger hormone known as ghrelin. This hormone will tell the hypothalamus in your brain that it’s almost time to eat and that you need sustenance. In response, the brain will release an additional hormone known as neuropeptide Y, sending a message to your entire body that you’re hungry and need to eat relatively soon.

While you’re eating a meal to satisfy your hunger, your body will release another hunger hormone known as leptin. This hormone will let your body know when you’re feeling full and decrease the amount of neuropeptide Y flowing through your bloodstream. About 5 to 20 minutes after a meal, you’ll feel satiated, and the process will begin again within a few hours when the stomach is empty once more.

Hunger is the innate need for food and isn’t a sudden desire to eat a specific food during the day. In that instance, your “hunger” is a “craving” or an “appetite.”

Real Hunger Versus Other Types Of Hungers

“Real” hunger is what we just reviewed in the last section, a type of hunger that develops when your body knows it needs refueling. You’ll see that you’re experiencing real hunger when low blood sugar levels give you a headache, make you tired, and make your stomach growl.

But you'll want to be aware of several other types of hunger to address them as they arise in your life. In this section, we'll be discussing what makes these other types of hunger *different* than real hunger *and* how to identify them, according to [Tufts Medical Center](#).

Cellular Hunger

Do you remember the last time midday struck, and you felt the *need* to eat something sweet? If you suddenly feel hungry for something salty, sweet, or fatty, you might be dealing with “cellular hunger.” This type of hunger rears its head when the cells in your body need to replenish specific nutrients, like protein, sodium, or sugar.

Eye Hunger

Have you ever laid eyes on a beautifully prepared slice of cheesecake with strawberry syrup drizzled along the top? If you suddenly felt a second wave of hunger upon seeing a particular food, you may have been feeling “eye hunger.” This type of hunger is triggered when you appreciate how a dish or meal looks physically — you see the food and suddenly feel hungry.

Heart Hunger

Do you remember when you were upset and felt a resounding hunger for the chocolate donuts that *always* make you feel better? If you feel hungry when facing tough emotions, you might be dealing with “heart hunger.” This type of hunger stems from a lack of intimacy, loneliness, sadness, and a desire for attention from others.

Mouth Hunger

Have you ever caught yourself eating a spoonful of creamy peanut butter purely because you craved its texture on your tongue? If you engage in mindless eating because you enjoy the crunch, sweetness, or spice of a particular food, you're probably facing “mouth hunger.” This type of hunger can only be satisfied by your mouth's desires.

Nose Hunger

Do you remember the last time you walked into a fancy restaurant and caught a whiff of delicious barbecue ribs? If you didn't even need the menu to decide to order the rib dish, there's a good chance you were experiencing something called "nose hunger." This type of hunger arises when your sense of smell allows you to envision the taste of the food you smell.

Why Humans Eat

The most common reason that humans eat is that you have to for survival. Your body and mind will sense that your insulin and blood glucose levels are low and that you need to eat in order to bring them back to their normal baseline. Without food and proper nutrition, the body will begin to break down and function poorly.

The [Scottish Eating Disorders Interest Group](#) states the malnourishment and starvation will take a toll on the human body rather quickly. After short periods of fasting or lack of nutrition, you may experience headaches, fatigue, and hair loss. But, as you avoid eating longer, your muscles will begin wasting away, organ failure will develop, electrical impulses in your heart will be negatively impacted, and bones will become brittle and easily breakable.

Pleasure Eating

[Pleasure eating](#) is a psychological reason behind your desire to eat. This type of eating occurs well-after your body has the calories and nutrients it needs to survive for the remainder of the day — instead of being hungry and *needing* to eat, you're deciding to eat because you want to.

There's a good chance that you engage in pleasure eating when consuming your favorite foods, such as pizza or cake. As you're eating this food, your body will release the hunger hormone, ghrelin, that tells your body that you're still not full, even though you might be. In normal hunger, your body would trigger leptin release to let you know that you're full.

The reason you continue to eat well-past the point of satiety is the functioning of the brain's reward system. Some foods, often sweet foods, will encourage the body to release dopamine and serotonin, two hormones that make you feel happy. Therefore, pleasure eating comes from the desire to experience those hormones and fulfill your reward system.

Emotional Eating

Emotional eating comes from a desire to feel good, fill feelings of emptiness, and cope with tough emotions and feelings. When you feel a sense of stress or anxiety, there might be a specific food that you crave to give you this immediate stress relief.

Any emotional trigger can lead to emotional eating, whether you're going through a breakup, are simply bored, feel lonely, have job stress, or are suffering from financial difficulties. You'll continue to eat until you feel better about your emotional trials and tribulations rather than when you feel "full."

What It Really Means To Control Your Appetite

There's a lot more that goes into appetite control than just reminding yourself not to eat that piece of cake at dessert or take an extra slice of pizza at lunchtime.

Signs Of Legitimate Appetite Control

If you have legitimate control of your appetite, the following statements will be true:

- You eat because you're showing signs of hunger (like hunger pangs or a headache).
- You choose foods based on their nutritional value and how they can impact health.
- You eat at normal times (i.e., Not waking up in the middle of the night with cravings).
- You stop eating when you begin to feel full.
- You don't feel the *need* to eat a certain food simply because you smell it.
- Your diet isn't making you feel sluggish, tired, or sick.
- You can distract yourself when you feel an appetite coming on.
- You are in control of your food intake. You do not binge on junk food and you indulge in treats only on occasion being mindful of portion control.

In most cases, having great appetite control means eating when your body needs to eat, not when your mind needs to eat.

The Benefits Of Controlling Your Appetite

The benefits of controlling your appetite seem quite evident to the naked eye. For example, not splurging on fatty or sugary foods during the day can keep your weight under control and avoid the development of conditions like heart disease. Below, we'll review some benefits of appetite control and why these results may occur.

Weight Control

Your body is always burning calories to stay alive, whether you're sitting at your desk, taking a nap, or exercising at the gym. Eating food gives your body the calories it needs to supply you with energy to get through the day, make you less tired, and perform the necessary functions within the cells. Creating a balance between the calories you burn and the calories you consume is essential for weight control.

Proper control of your appetite means you might only eat when you're hungry, or when your body decides it needs refueling. Eating to the point of satiety or fullness will keep your caloric intake under control and help you to maintain a healthy weight. Even 500 *extra* calories consumed per day after succumbing to your appetite can cause one pound of weight gain weekly.

Appetite control will prevent excess calories and eventual weight gain.

Prevention of Diabetes & Heart Disease

An out of control appetite doesn't normally come with cravings for healthy foods like peas, carrots, apples, or unsalted peanuts. There's a good chance that you're craving salty, fatty, or sugary foods instead. In moderation, a little unhealthy snacking is normal — when you begin to eat these foods in excess, they can impact your body's functioning.

For example, a study in [Nutrients](#) states that eating many foods high in sodium (like pizza or burgers) disrupts the fluid balance in your kidneys and forces your heart to pump harder to supply blood to the body while accounting for the fluid retention. In the long-term, too much sodium intake can lead to high blood pressure and eventually heart disease.

The body relies on carbohydrates, including sugars, to give the body energy that's ultimately pushed into the cells. However, excess sugar intake (such as through pastries and candy) will cause too much sugar to end up in the blood. The pancreas is no longer able to supply enough insulin to force the blood sugar into the cells for energy, leading to high blood sugar.

Controlling your appetite and eating *healthy* foods when you're hungry can avoid splurging on unhealthy foods that set you up for future diseases.

Better Coping Strategies

According to the [American Psychological Association](#), about 38% of Americans overeat in an attempt to cope with stress. Overeating can take a toll on your physique and your body composition, but it also sets a dangerous precedent for your emotional health.

It's crucial to develop positive and healthy coping strategies to deal with mental and emotional strain, whether you're stressed out from a long day at work or going through a lengthy divorce. Regaining control of your appetite will allow you to view food as a fuel source instead of a coping mechanism. This can encourage you to address your unresolved emotional issues or stress through more logical means, such as therapy or yoga.

It's essential to prioritize your mental health before you begin to tackle your physical health!

Great Nutrition

Perhaps the greatest benefit of appetite control is that you're eating to fuel your body correctly, not to fuel your body based on your cravings. Instead of eating foods high in fat, sugar, or salt,

you're eating foods that are nutrient-dense and benefit the body's cells and organs. For example, you'll eat chicken for lunch because you know your body needs protein to build strong muscles. This is considered "mindful" eating and can be a tricky thing to learn.

Healthy Weight Management And Appetite Control

Healthy weight management and appetite control are two concepts that go hand-in-hand. Unless you have a diagnosed medical condition (like thyroid problems), there's a good chance that a hefty appetite will lead to unwanted weight gain. But there's another interesting relationship between these two concepts: Weight loss and appetite gain.

A study published in the [American Journal of Physiology](#) shows that significant weight loss after dieting can eventually trigger a greater-than-normal appetite and hunger. Months or years after beginning a diet, you might notice that you're far hungrier than your baseline due to your body releasing excess levels of the hunger hormone, ghrelin. These results help to explain why so many dieters regain the weight they lost after their diet is over.

This study also shows that taking control of your weight *may not* help you regain your appetite (though, the vice versa is true).

How Certain Foods Can Affect Appetite

You might not even realize that the foods you're using to fuel your body are causing your unruly appetite. On the other hand, certain foods you're already eating may be holding your appetite off for a few hours after your last meal. In this section, we'll be reviewing certain types of food that impact appetite.

Fiber

Foods that are high in fiber are necessary for the average diet, especially when it comes to keeping your digestive system functioning as intended. The digestive system cannot entirely digest fiber, so it mainly sits in your gastrointestinal tract a bit longer than other types of food. As the fiber stays in your gut, it tells your brain that you're still full.

This effect is most often apparent after eating soluble fiber, a type of fiber that mimics the texture of gel while it's being digested and slows digestion down a bit. Examples of soluble fiber include foods like seeds, nuts, beans, sweet potatoes, and broccoli.

Refined Carbohydrates

The majority of the carbs you're eating in your diet are likely refined carbs, including everything from white rice/pasta to sugar-sweetened treats. This type of carb lacks the fiber your gastrointestinal tract needs to regulate bowel movements, so refined carbs travel through your system at higher speeds.

This results in reduced feelings of fullness and hunger that returns just an hour or two after eating these carbs. Based on these effects, the best type of carbs for your body are whole grains, vegetables, and fruits.

Water

The body needs water to stay hydrated and keep the body functioning optimally. Most research shows that the average person needs to drink over 64 ounces of water for fluid balance and nerve health.

However, water also plays an essential role in appetite control. Drinking about two glasses of water (16 or more ounces) can trick your stomach into feeling full, even if only a few minutes at a time. The effects of water on your appetite and hunger explain why it might be useful to drink water before a meal to limit how much you eat.

Protein

The body needs protein for several vital functions, such as maintaining muscle mass and controlling metabolism. Getting enough protein can also produce one substantial effect: Reducing your appetite.

This newfound lower appetite comes from protein's ability to trigger hunger hormones in the body, specifically those that tell you that you're "full" shortly after eating and reduce the production of appetite-stimulating ghrelin. Adding foods like milk, chicken, yogurt, and fish to your diet can keep your appetite under better control.

Assessment: Are Your Appetite And Eating Patterns Normal?

Unless you work one-on-one with a nutritionist or a dietician, you might not know if your eating patterns are “normal” and whether or not you’re overeating.

To determine if you have a problem with your eating and appetite, ask yourself the following 15 questions.

1. Do I eat because I’m hungry? For pleasure? Out of boredom?
2. Do I eat when I feel overwhelmed? Stressed? Sad? Angry? Anxious?
3. Do I ever skip meals during the week? Double-up on meals?
4. Am I suddenly eating more than usual? Less than usual?
5. Have I ever woken up at night with intense food cravings?
6. Are there certain foods I crave more than normal? Are they healthy or unhealthy?
7. How large are the meals and snacks that I eat?
8. How many times do I eat in a single day?
9. Are my eating habits contributing to serious weight loss? Weight gain?
10. Do I choose foods based on their nutritional value? Taste? Texture?
11. Do certain events or emotions trigger a desire to eat?
12. How do I feel after satisfying my appetite? Content? Guilty? Ashamed?
13. Are my eating patterns impeding my health and fitness goals?
14. Do I ever let myself feel hunger pangs before eating?
15. Has my eating pattern led to the development of a medical condition? Which one?

By answering the questions in the list above, you can get a better gauge on what your current eating habits are like. This assessment can help you determine whether you eat for emotional reasons, adopt a wildly unhealthy diet, eat past the point of satiety, and eat purely for pleasure rather than satisfying real hunger.

20 Ways To Regain Control Of Your Appetite

There's a lot more to controlling your appetite than denying yourself food when you sense a craving coming on. Appetite control will typically stem from developing better self-control, making minor changes to your current diet, and addressing your emotional needs and stresses.

Below, we'll describe 20 ways that you can work to regain control of your appetite and take your nutritional health back into your own hands.

1. **Eat more protein.** A diet that's high in lean protein (like meat, fish, and dairy) can trigger an additional release of hunger-suppressing hormones. So, think about adding protein to your diet through salmon, eggs, almonds, and peanut butter to feel fuller for longer.
2. **Drink coffee.** The 100 milligrams of caffeine and the chlorogenic acids in every cup of coffee may reduce hunger pangs and control your appetite. Start your morning with a cup of hot coffee for an energy boost and help hold your hunger off until lunchtime.
3. **Decide on a set eating schedule.** The human body craves consistency, which is why a set eating schedule can help with appetite control. Your body and mind will get accustomed to eating at certain times, holding off hunger and appetite until mealtimes.
4. **Snack regularly throughout the day.** Satisfying your appetite doesn't have to come in the form of a large and calorie-dense meal. Eating small snacks during the day, such as a granola bar or a handful of almonds, can keep you from overeating between meals.
5. **Eat spicy food.** Hot and spicy foods, such as jalapeno peppers or curry, make you feel full and encourage your body to burn more calories. These effects can help you to keep your appetite under control and trigger weight loss to a small extent.

6. **Deal with your cravings.** Everybody has food triggers and having access to your favorite cravings in your pantry or refrigerator is an unnecessary risk. Consider taking the chips, cookies, ice cream, or cake out of the house to limit your access. The cravings will pass.
7. **Drink more water.** There's a scientific link between drinking water before a meal and consuming more than 20% fewer calories during these meals. These results are more likely to occur if you drink a glass of water within 30 minutes of eating.
8. **Get more exercise.** Research shows that aerobic exercise can limit the appetite-stimulating hormone known as ghrelin. Visiting the gym or going for a run can help you suppress an overzealous appetite that doesn't seem to fade away.
9. **Eat slowly.** It takes the brain about 20 minutes to register satiety. Harvard Health states, "Scientists have known for some time that a full stomach is only part of what causes someone to feel satisfied after a meal; the brain must also receive a series of signals from digestive hormones secreted by the gastrointestinal tract."

Zane Andrews (associate professor of physiology and a neuroscientist at Monash University who studies how food affects the brain) told the Huffington post, *"But it's not until that food gets into the stomach and into the gut that it starts to release satiety hormones which feed back to the brain to tell us we're full. "But that food needs to be chewed, to go down into the gut and to be processed a little bit. You need to start absorbing the glucose from the food and that happens generally quickly, but somewhere between five and 20 minutes."*

To eat slowly, take your time, pay attention to your food, enjoy, and chew your food thoroughly with each meal.

- 10. Plan your meals out in advance.** Cravings tend to come from complete freedom to eat what you want when you want. Planning your meals ahead of time, such as through meal prep, can keep healthy eating on track and avoid excess snacking.
- 11. Don't skip meals.** Skipping meals is common for those who want to lose weight. Still, many people don't realize that it sends your appetite and hunger into overdrive — breaking the fast typically results in you eating more food and calories than usual.
- 12. Avoid an all-liquid diet.** Meal replacement shakes and liquid diets are popular for triggering weight loss, but they don't do much to control appetite. You're getting the nutrients you need yet feel the rumbling in your stomach after finishing the shake.
- 13. Get more sleep.** Not getting enough sleep causes a spike in ghrelin, meaning you'll wake up with an appetite that you can hardly satisfy. Controlling your hunger hormones through rest requires at least seven hours of quality sleep every night.
- 14. Find a new hobby.** If you eat in excess due to stress, then you may simply need a hobby to get your mind off of food. Think about adopting a new hobby, such as photography, reading, exercise, drawing, or learning to play an instrument.
- 15. Choose healthy snack alternatives.** You can't entirely avoid building an appetite between meals. Yet, you do have control over how you decide to satisfy these cravings mid-day. Instead of sweets, eat healthy snacks like popcorn or trail mix.
- 16. Consume more fiber.** Fiber is a type of carbohydrate that the digestive system cannot digest. With that said, eating a decent amount of fiber can help you feel full for a long time. Add high fiber foods like oranges and apples to your diet, especially as snacks.

17. Be easy on yourself. Appetite and hunger are natural, so don't expect to be able to fight these sensations from day one. Give yourself time to build-up resilience and adopt a healthier eating plan before assuming that you can't regain control of your appetite.

18. Go for a walk. It can be hard to face your hunger pangs one-on-one when you're halfway between lunch and dinner. Consider going for a brief and brisk walk when your cravings hit to burn off some energy and refocus your attention.

19. Skip the snacks unless you're hungry. You appreciate having an eating schedule, but you don't technically have to eat your snacks if you're not hungry. Allow your hunger and appetite to build-up naturally so that you're hungry by the time your next meal arrives.

20. Cope with your stress directly. Many people turn to food to cope with stress, so you may need to discover a healthier coping strategy as an alternative. Consider speaking with a therapist, working out at the gym, or writing in a journal.

It may not be feasible to make all 20 of these changes in your life at the present moment. With that said, even implementing one or two of these tips into your daily schedule can help you progress toward having maximum control of your appetite.

Remember that starving yourself and intentionally skipping meals won't train your body not to be so hungry. There are no shortcuts regarding appetite control, and you must approach this serious issue safely.

Final Thoughts

If getting your appetite under control *quickly* was possible, everybody would do it! Many people don't understand that proper appetite control stems from physical and psychological factors that you need to address directly.

For example, some people eat because they feel real hunger, evidenced by signs like headaches or fatigue after going long periods without eating. Other people will eat because they're looking to cope with the emotional stress that they're facing.

There are plenty of clear benefits of superior appetite control. Being able to control your desire to eat and what you ultimately end up eating during a meal poses benefits like better weight management, a proliferation of coping strategies, a decreased risk of conditions like diabetes and heart disease, and generally more excellent nutrition.

Fortunately, getting your appetite under control can result from actions as simple as drinking water before a meal, cutting carbs from your diet, and eating more fiber during the day.

The first step in controlling your appetite is understanding and admitting that your appetite has taken on a life of its own. Once you realize that your appetite is out of control, try interventions like exercise, eating slowly, or sticking to a strict eating schedule to see if you can regain control. Understand that retaking control of your appetite won't immediately trigger weight loss or a sudden change in dietary habits.

If you're having difficulty controlling your hunger and appetite, visit your doctor. There's a chance that what you're experiencing is the result of a pre-existing medical condition rather than poor self-control.