Intuitive Eating

Ask Yourself

- Do you diet, count calories, or skip meals to reduce how much you eat?
- Have you restricted your food intake or skipped a meal only to overeat or binge later?
- Do you ever feel out of control when you are eating or eat so much that you feel uncomfortably full?
- Have you been taught to always finish the food on your plate?
- Do you feel ashamed, disgusted, or guilty after eating?

If you answered ‘yes’ to any of these questions, you might benefit from learning more about dieting versus intuitive eating.

Outcomes of Dieting

- 95% of dieters regain weight within 1-5 years\(^1\)
- Chronic dieting and regaining weight (weight cycling) increases inflammation, blood pressure, risk of cardiovascular disease, morbidity and mortality.\(^2\)
- Young adults between the ages of 14-15 who diet are five times more likely to develop an eating disorder.\(^1\)

Outcomes of Intuitive Eating

- Young adult women who reported trusting their body to tell them how much to eat had almost 40% lower odds of reporting dieting behaviors than those who reported that they do not trust their body, while young adult men had 75% lower odds.\(^3\)
- Practicing aspects of intuitive eating was associated with lower a BMI.\(^3\)
- Improved psychological health, physical health, including blood pressure and cholesterol levels, as well as improve dietary intake and eating behaviors.\(^4\)
- Improved self-acceptance, body satisfaction, decreased body image avoidance, decreased body preoccupation, decreased drive for thinness, and decreased negative self-talk.\(^5\)
- Improvements in depression, self-esteem, negative affect, quality of life, ineffectiveness, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, and general wellbeing.\(^5\)

What is Intuitive Eating?

Intuitive Eating\(^6\) provides a self-care eating framework that integrates instinct, emotion, and rational thought to improve one’s relationship with food, and is based on the following 10 principles:

1. **Reject the diet mentality.** Quick-fix diets do not deliver healthy, sustainable results. Ditch the fad diets to rediscover what it means to eat intuitively.

2. **Honor your hunger.** Pay attention to your body and when you are hungry, eat. True hunger can take time to recognize so this may require mindful practice.

3. **Make peace with food.** There are no “good” or “bad” foods no matter what the latest trend is telling you. Food is neutral, providing fuel, nourishment, and enjoyment. Avoiding certain foods can lead to uncontrollable cravings, so remember that all foods fit into a healthy diet.

4. **Challenge the food police.** Be mindful of all the false beliefs you may have about the types/amounts of food you eat based on what you have heard from friends, family, media, etc.

5. **Discover the satisfaction factor.** Fully immerse yourself in your eating experiences. Pay attention to different tastes, smells, textures, colors, emotions, and thoughts about the food you are eating. Taking pleasure in what you eat will leave you feeling more satisfied and content.

6. **Feel your fullness.** It is important to eat when you’re hungry, but it is also important to stop when you’re full. Learn to listen to your fullness cues and respect them.

7. **Cope with your emotions with kindness.** People may use food to cope with feelings of anxiety, loneliness, boredom, anger, or stress. Find different ways to resolve these emotions as food is often a short-term solution which does not address the source of the problem.

8. **Respect your body.** Accept your body as it is. In doing so you will learn to respect your body and, in turn, feel better about yourself.

9. **Movement—feel the difference.** Find something sustainable and enjoyable. This is not about burning calories but about taking care of yourself and focusing on how it feels to be in your body.

10. **Honor your health with gentle nutrition.** Make food choices that honor your health as well as your taste buds. By embracing the previous principles, you will soon learn which foods taste great, which ones make you feel great, and which ones cater to both needs. Use what you learn to move forward and make decisions that fit your needs best.