

Improving your eating habits



Information for patients

Sheffield Dietetics



PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



The information in this booklet can help you to:

- Learn to listen again to your body's signals that tell you when you are hungry and when you've had enough to eat.
- Learn how to act on these signals more often, to stop you overeating.

Mealtimes: could you be eating more than you need?

Many of us eat more than we need. It is easy to put too much food on your plate at meal times and then it can be very hard to leave it. Our body gives us signals that tell us we are full, however these can easily be missed. When we do this a lot, it gets harder to know when we are full and often the fullness signals can disappear altogether. It gets harder to know what a normal portion is.

The good news is you can get these feelings back by taking the time to improve your eating habits. One step towards this is to have a good, honest look at your portion sizes at mealtimes.

Make a start

Begin to cut your meal portions down slightly. This will take a little bit of concentration but make a real effort and use these tips to help:

- Try a smaller plate. Choose a plate the next size down from the one you use at the moment.
- Have plenty of vegetables on your plate. Put the vegetables on your plate first and fill up half your plate with these.
- In time, you may find you are able to reduce your portions even further still.

Who does the shopping, cooking and serving of your meals? If it is not you, then it will be important to explain to whoever does these jobs, that you are trying to make changes. Thus, they can buy less food and cook and serve smaller portions.

Portion sizes

If you would like more specific information on portions, then please ask your dietitian for an accompanying booklet. Recommended portion sizes may be very different from the amounts that you normally eat.

Gradually work towards the portions recommended over a number of weeks. It can be helpful to weigh foods to check your portion sizes using accurate kitchen scales.

Slow down at mealtimes

- When we eat a meal, there is a delay between us eating enough and our brain getting this message.
- This can take up to 20 minutes. During this 20 minute delay, you may continue eating.
- By the time your brain knows you are full, you may have eaten much more than you needed.
- You will feel discomfort.

Teach yourself to eat more slowly using the following tips to get you started.

Tips to slow down your eating

Remember, when you try these tips at first you will have to concentrate and it may seem odd, but persevere and they will soon become part of your life.

1. Use cutlery

- Whenever possible, use a knife and fork. You are much more likely to eat quickly using your hands.
- Cut food into smaller pieces and put in your mouth one piece at a time.
- Put your knife, fork or spoon down after each mouthful.

2. Sit down when you eat, preferably at a table

- Eating on the move means you will forget to think about slowing your eating.

3. Avoid eating whilst working, reading, driving, watching TV, doing housework, using the computer etc.

- Eating when doing other things means you concentrate less on your food and this can lead to overeating.

4. Avoid eating on your own where possible

- If you are eating with other people, have a chat between mouthfuls.

5. Taste and enjoy every mouthful you eat by chewing it slowly

- Chew your food for longer than you normally would before swallowing it.
- Savour the food in your mouth by not swallowing it so quickly.
- Concentrate on the flavours.

6. Have a break midway through the meal

- Put your knife and fork down for a few moments halfway through your meal.
- If you are having more than one course, have a 10 to 20 minute break in between courses.
- Do not automatically go for second helpings. Wait at least 10 minutes after finishing your first portion and then use your hunger score (see page 6) to reconsider if you really do still feel hungry. You'll often find you don't want it after all.

Get snacking under control

Once you are eating your regular meals more slowly and in smaller portions, the next step is to control your eating between meals. Learn to eat only when you are hungry and say no to cravings.

Whenever you think about having extra snacks or going back for more after a meal, ask yourself:

- Am I truly hungry?
Get into the habit of only eating if the answer is **yes**.
- Could this be a craving?
If so, learn to say **no** to them more often.

The next few pages will give you lots of tips on how to do this successfully.

Learn more about your hunger

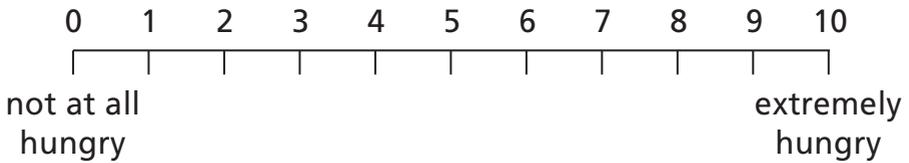
There are lots of reasons why we eat, other than being hungry. Thinking about, seeing or smelling food can make you want to eat. You might eat when you are feeling bored, stressed or just fed up.

How hungry are you now? A simple way of helping you answer this question is to use the hunger score. This has been used by lots of people to help them get their eating under control.

The hunger score is a 10 point scale. A score of 0 means you are not at all hungry, for example, after a large meal. A score of 10 is when you are extremely hungry, for example, after you have missed a meal or not eaten for many hours.

Before automatically having a snack, use the scale on the next page to score your hunger.

The hunger score



From now on get into the habit of checking your hunger score before you eat anything. Try it. It has helped many people to eat less.

Some people find it useful to set a number on the hunger score and then try not to eat until they have reached that level. Often, people have set 7 or 8 as the point they will wait to reach before eating. What point on the hunger score do you plan to wait for until you eat something?

My hunger score target will be _____

Learning more about your cravings

You've had a lovely evening meal and you are not feeling hungry. You are feeling a bit bored and go into the kitchen. On the side is a packet of chocolate digestives. They look good. You hadn't been feeling hungry but seeing them makes your mouth water. You reach for the biscuits. They smell good. You take one out and eat it quickly. They taste good. You reach for another.

This is a craving. You are not particularly hungry, in fact you only ate half an hour ago. But something other than hunger - sight, smell, the thought of a certain food has given you a desire to eat.

What would you do next? Would you keep eating to satisfy the craving or fight it?

Whenever you experience a craving you can try to resist it. It is important that you learn to tell the difference between hunger and cravings. Reading through some of the following common situations should help to get you thinking.

Craving or hunger?

1. You have just cleared your plate but there are still the leftovers. You feel you have room for more.

Craving - As mentioned earlier, when we eat a meal, there is a delay between us having eaten enough and our brain getting this message. One way of overcoming this is to learn to eat more slowly and so give your body the time that it needs to tell you that you are full.

2. Someone mentions your favourite food and you feel like eating.

Craving - We all have our weaknesses. Some people find the thought of certain food makes them want to eat it regardless of how full they feel. This could be something you've seen on TV, someone else eating, talking about food, reading about food etc. If this is you, then spot these cravings and use the ideas provided on the next few pages, to help you beat them.

3. You haven't thought about eating all day, but you are getting the shakes and feel light headed.

Hunger - Shaking, feeling light headed. I think your body is trying to tell you something. It is hungry! Try to avoid being in this situation. It makes it harder to control your eating when you are over-hungry. It is easy to be greedy and eat more than we need or eat high calorie snacks, for example, crisps, chocolate and biscuits, when we have gone too long without food.

4. Your partner complains that food is being wasted, as you aren't eating as much as you used to. You eat an extra sandwich to use up the bread and cheese.

Craving - If you are not involved in shopping and cooking at home, talk with whoever does these jobs about your new appetite. It is important that they know you want to eat less. Then they can plan ahead by doing a smaller shop, cooking smaller amounts and serving smaller meals. This way there won't be lots of leftovers to tempt you.

5. You walk past the bakery and feel like eating something.

Hunger? - Check your hunger score. Your score is 7. You realise its lunchtime already and you haven't eaten for hours. Alternatively, your score may be 4. You only had lunch 1 hour ago. This is a craving. What could you do? Tackle the craving head on and keep walking? In the future you may wish to remove the temptation by walking a different route to avoid the bakery.

6. Your friend has bought you your favourite cake and offers it to you, but you are still feeling quite satisfied after your lunch. You want to eat it.

Craving - Sometimes this sort of situation leads us to eat when we don't need to. Get used to saying 'no thanks' to people when they offer you food and snacks when you are not hungry. You may need to practice. Eating with friends and family is an enjoyable experience. Often we can be offered food as an expression of love or friendship so it can be hard to say no.

What could you do to help with these situations? Sometimes explaining to loved ones why the dietary changes are so important to you can help and they may agree not to put you in this type of situation.

7. You go to an all-you-can-eat buffet and you want to get your money's worth by going back for more and more.

Craving - It can be really difficult not to overeat at these buffets. See how you get on controlling your eating, but if all else fails maybe it's best avoiding them and eating elsewhere. When eating out, get used to leaving food on your plate or order a smaller portion such as a starter for a main meal.

Eat slowly and enjoy the company by chatting between mouthfuls. You'll be amazed at how satisfied you can feel with less food.

Tips to beat those food cravings

Start to try and spot your cravings from now on. Whenever you experience a craving try to resist it. Cravings can pass in 5 - 10 minutes, especially if you distract yourself. Try some of the following tips to help.

Avoid temptation. Try to keep as little tempting food in the house as possible. What you do have, keep out of sight so as not to tempt you further.

Think. Try not to rush into eating something, give yourself a few moments to think clearly. Ask yourself:

- Am I hungry? (use hunger score on page 6)
- Can I wait until my next planned meal?
- Do I really need to eat this now?

Crush the Cravings. Often a brief distraction is all that is needed to deal with a craving, because they do pass quickly.

Next time you feel a craving coming on, try one of these techniques:

- Do something to take your mind off the craving - cravings usually pass in minutes.
- Try going for a walk, reading the paper or calling a friend. Do anything to stop you thinking about food.

- Fight the craving. Tell yourself, I can beat it and I will.

It often only takes a couple of minutes for a craving to pass.

- Have a non-alcoholic drink; it often takes the hunger pangs away.
- Take some exercise (for example 30 minutes brisk walking); it can really help to reduce the craving.
- It will be a big help if you learn to recognise and resist cravings.
- If you are hungry, eat something better for you than the food you are craving. Fruit or cereal is a great choice.

Beat boredom. If you eat when you are bored, try to fill your time with things you enjoy. Here are some ideas.

- Read
- Do a crossword or suduko
- Call somebody
- Send a letter, email or text, surf the internet
- Plan a holiday
- Go for a walk
- Tidy up
- Have a bath
- Keep busy with a new or old hobby

How could you distract yourself?

I could take my mind off cravings by (fill in your own ideas below)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Keeping a food diary

You can get a better understanding of your eating habits by keeping a food diary for a few days.

Here is an example of a food diary. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What did I eat?
- When did I eat it?
- How was I feeling? (hungry, bored, fed up, enjoying company etc)
- What was my hunger score?
- Who did I eat with? (Do you feel you should always accept a biscuit at your friend's house?)

Time	Food eaten and amount	How did you feel before you ate? (Hungry, fed up, bored, angry...)	Hunger score (0-10)	Where were you and who were you with?

Keeping a food diary can be very motivating. It can help you to:

- See your eating patterns more clearly and spot things you are doing that may be helpful and unhelpful.
- See what you have actually eaten throughout the day. We often eat more than we realise, for example extra snacks?
- Re-tune into feelings of 'fullness', 'hunger' and 'craving', by making a note of your hunger scores alongside the meals and snacks.
- Set goals. What are you doing now and how would you like this to be different in the future?
- Decide what you are going to do differently to reach these goals.

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