

# Intuitive Eating

Intuitive Eating involves being connected to, trusting in, and responding to our body's internal hunger and fullness cues. It is grounded in the belief that we are born with the wisdom of knowing what, when, and how much to eat. Research on intuitive eating shows that it is associated with, and helps promote, psychological well-being and health among various groups, including college students.<sup>1,2</sup> For example, intuitive eating is associated with higher self-compassion, mindfulness, emotional awareness, emotional regulation, distress tolerance, life satisfaction, positive emotions (such as joy), self-esteem, proactive coping, and hardiness. It is also connected to lower depression and anxiety levels. These are just a few benefits of intuitive eating.<sup>3,4</sup>

Intuitive eating has also been shown to be a protective factor against the development of eating disorders; it is linked to lower levels of binge eating, bulimic symptoms, drive for thinness, situational eating, emotional eating, food preoccupation, and anxiety around food. It has also been correlated with lower levels of other risk factors such as internalization of appearance ideals, body dissatisfaction, body shame, internalized weight stigma, and body comparison.<sup>4</sup> Intuitive eating also promotes body appreciation and body image flexibility, which are other protective factors against the development of eating disorders.<sup>1,2</sup>

## Intuitive eating

is...<sup>4</sup>

- **Permission to eat**
  - Eat the foods you find pleasurable.
  - Try not to label your food as good or bad.
  - Challenge the voice in your head that tells you what you should eat, when you should eat, and how much you should eat.
- **Reliance on hunger and fullness cues**
  - Don't avoid eating when hungry.
  - Listen to your body when it tells you you are comfortably full.
  - Savor food and enjoy the eating experience. Notice the taste, texture, smell, and appearance of food.
- **Eating for physical rather than emotional reasons**
  - It is common to sometimes emotionally eat like when we celebrate birthdays or eat ice cream after a breakup. However, when emotional eating is frequent and causes additional stress, it can negatively affect you.
  - Consistently using food to comfort or distract ourselves can prevent us from uncovering and addressing the underlying emotions we are experiencing, such as shame, sadness, boredom, or anger.

The background features a central white rectangular area containing text. Surrounding this area are various abstract, colorful shapes and patterns, including curved lines in shades of orange, teal, and blue, and clusters of small dots in blue, orange, and grey. The overall aesthetic is modern and artistic.

- **Body-Food Choice Congruence**

- Listen, appreciate, and take care of our bodies with mindful self-care.
  - There are many ways to do this! One way of listening to your body is noticing physical signs of stress. Your body may be telling you it's stressed when it feels tight, has a racing heart, or struggles to sleep at night. Your body may need to slow down and de-stress. Coloring, meditation, or stretching may help you and your body de-stress.
- Engage in joyful exercise that works well for you and your body.
  - Exercise doesn't always have to be workout class or a run, especially if that is not fun for you. Exercise could be having a dance party while getting ready for the day or sledding at a local park.
- Be mindful of how food affects you, your energy, and stamina.
  - Feeling drained and hungry after a bomb of classes but need to go to the library for a study sesh? Think about what snack is going to give the most energy and help you feel satisfied.

## References

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2. Bombak, A., Monaghan, L. F., & Rich, E. (2019). Dietary approaches to weight-loss, Health At Every Size® and beyond: rethinking the war on obesity. *Social Theory & Health*, 17(1), 89-108. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41285-018-0070-9>
3. Schaefer, J. T., & Magnuson, A. B. (2014). A Review of Interventions that Promote Eating by Internal Cues. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 114(5), 734-760. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2013.12.024>
4. Wood-Barcalow, N., Tylka, T. L., & Judge, C. (2021). *Positive body image workbook: a clinical and self-improvement guide* (1 Edition). Cambridge University Press.