

Listening to your Body

With all the modern distractions we face, we are not in touch with our bodies anymore. We eat when we're not hungry; oftentimes, we don't even know whether we're hungry or feel like eating out of boredom, loneliness or other emotions.

Babies naturally know when they're truly hungry, and they let us know by crying. When they're full, they stop eating. Somehow, while growing up, we lose touch with the signals our body sends us.

Signals related to food are among the many alerts we receive from our bodies. They are of three kinds

- Hunger: a physical sensation in your stomach that makes you want to eat. It is triggered by the activity of a part of our brains called the hypothalamus, and by decreased blood sugar, emptiness of the stomach and intestines, and certain hormones levels in your body

- Satiety: A feeling of satisfaction that results when nerves in your stomach signal the brain that the stomach is full. Increased blood sugar, the presence of food in the gut, and the activity of the hypothalamus result in this signal

- Appetite: A desire or interest in food set off by visual and smell cues of food. You feel like eating, but you're not hungry. On the flip side, you don't feel like eating even when you're hungry.

How do we learn to listen to these signals again?

- First, find out where you are now. Keep a food journal. Record when and what you ate and your activity and emotions before you ate.

- Use a hunger scale ranging from 1 (starving, dizzy and weak) to 10 (so full that you are physically sick). Eat when you are at 3 or 4 and stop when you're at 5 or 6 on the scale.

- Don't ignore appetite signals. Eating healthily doesn't mean cutting out enjoyment altogether!

Soon, you will be in harmony with your hunger signals; it will once again become second nature to eat only when you're hungry, and stop when you're full.