

Avoid Overeating - But Stay Satisfied



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During stressful times, we tend to turn to emotional overeating or go for those starchy, crunchy comfort foods.

This is okay on occasion, but don't allow these choices to become every meal and every snack. Make sure to include other more nutritious foods. This will help support your immune system so you're as healthy as you can be during these times.

While in quarantine, you may find yourself eating at 9, 9:30, 9:45, and 11:30 a.m. Soon, it turns into a whole day of eating, but you're not necessarily feeling satisfied. When you don't feel satiated, or satisfied, you can easily eat nonstop and still crave

something more. This behavior can trigger feelings of guilt. Make sure you reach that satiety factor when you sit down for a meal or grab a snack, so you can avoid mindlessly eating throughout the day.

Sticking to an eating schedule can also help you avoid endless snacking and the highs and lows of blood sugar spikes and crashes.

Don't get hangry—practice mindful eating.

Consider the hunger scale from 0 to 10. You want to avoid both of the extremes. Let's say the zero is when you're so hungry you might become irritable or angry ("hangry"). This can give you headaches. You might feel nauseous, lightheaded, or shaky. This typically happens when you're so busy or stressed that you forget to eat. Sometimes this happens when you're just not doing anything, but the day passes by and suddenly you realize, "Oh shoot. It's 3 p.m., and I haven't eaten anything."

Mindful eating means being more aware of your body's signals and mental cues, so you know when you should eat to avoid hitting that low point (the "zero").

When I refer to the opposite end of the hunger scale — the number 10 — that's when we overindulge and eat in excess. Think about food-centric holidays and celebrations, and how you eat when you're on vacation. You might eat so much that you feel painfully or uncomfortably full, nauseous, and bloated. Being in quarantine, having constant access to your refrigerator, and baking all weekend can tip your scale toward this extreme.

Think of the middle of the scale as neutral — you are neither hangry nor overly full. Aim to be somewhere around a 6 or 8 on this scale, so you feel a sense of long-lasting satiety. You want to acknowledge when you need to eat, eat enough to get satiated but not overly full, then wait for your hunger cues to return before you eat

again. Soon you'll become more mindful of your body's food needs so you can say, "I'm getting hungry, but I know if I wait a couple more hours, I'm going to get way too hungry. Then I'm likely to mindlessly eat until I'm too full and uncomfortable."

Mindful eating also means paying attention to how you feel after you eat certain foods versus others. Do you notice a difference on days when you have eggs and veggies for breakfast versus Greek yogurt and fruit versus oatmeal or cold cereal? You could have oatmeal with a side Greek yogurt and fruit for a more satisfying meal.



Let's talk about snacks.

Be mindful and consider the hunger scale (0 to 10). If you're running really low on energy because you haven't eaten in hours, you might need a real balanced meal instead of a snack.

There's a misconception about snacks. If you're thinking, "I'm just going to have an apple, and that will keep me steady for the whole afternoon" — likely that won't be the case.

"Think of snacks as mini meals."

The whole point of snacks is to stay satiated from one meal to the next. To achieve satiety for hours, you need to eat a combination of the food groups. I recommend

eating something with protein and fiber (like an apple with nut butter or cheese). The goal is to snack on something that satisfies your taste buds and keeps the hunger signal away for hours until you're ready for a complete meal.

As with your meals, your snacks also need variety to keep it interesting. If you're always going for cheese and an apple, you might get tired of it pretty quickly. Because we don't know how long we're going to be in quarantine, you want to establish healthy habits while you're at home that you're happy to continue once the lockdown is lifted. Finding foods you enjoy eating is also part of mindful eating. This will help you feel satisfied with your meals and snacks and reduce cravings throughout the day.

Get creative with your snacks.

If you like crunchy foods, instead of chips, go for plain popcorn or roasted chickpeas (add hot sauce, your favorite seasoning blend, a little grated cheese, or lime juice and cilantro for added flavor). Have a stick of string cheese on the side for added protein. Try making crispy kale chips in the oven. If you enjoy vinegar flavor (think salt and vinegar chips), try dried seaweed sheets with lime juice and salt. If you prefer sweet snacks, indulge with a few dark chocolate-covered almonds or a small bowl of berries with Greek yogurt and a piece of dark chocolate. If you like salty foods, try avocado slices and edamame with seasoned salt or hot sauce. For a sweet-and-savory treat, try mango or pineapple chunks with chili powder and cottage cheese.

You can even make smaller portions of meals you enjoy to have as snacks. Don't feel like, "This is a breakfast-only food." You can have a hard-boiled egg with a couple fiber-rich crackers or a small bowl of oatmeal with cinnamon, apple chunks, and nuts as a snack.

As always, try to “eat the rainbow” of colors and nutrients by including a variety of fruits and veggies in your snacks as much as you can.

Focus on making home-cooked nourishing, satisfying, and pleasurable meals. If you eat nutritious foods that you don’t find pleasurable, you’re not going to be able to keep up with those healthy choices.

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