



Know the different types of hunger.

Eating when I am not hungry is a habit I have developed over time. The good news is that I can change that habit. The first step is to realize that I am doing it. I cannot change habits I am unaware of.

Whenever I start thinking about eating, ask: “What am I feeling?”

Actual hunger: Hunger typically happens several times a day about 4-6 hours after the last meal. Not eating when actual hunger occurs can cause binge eating, slower metabolism, and weight gain.

- If I am not hungry at a meal time, try snacking on a small carbohydrate and protein combination to keep my body working properly.
- If I am actually hungry between mealtimes, it's alright to have a snack.

Hunger is a gift. It is my body's way of telling me what it needs.
If I am actually hungry, I should eat.

Habitual hunger: Sometimes hunger is triggered outside of meal times because a habit of snacking at certain times or occasions has been formed.

- If I am hungry every night after dinner and eat a snack, this is a habit.
- Next time I feel hungry in the evening, I should find something else to do to distract me to help change the habit. I could listen to music, fold laundry, color, knit or go for a walk.
- If I am still hungry after that, I may actually be hungry and should have a small, healthy snack.

Physical pain hunger: When the body is under extreme physical pain, food is often used as a way to take the mind off the pain.

- If I want to eat because it might make my pain feel a little better, I am experiencing physical pain hunger.
- Be honest and ask myself, “What am I supposed to do for my pain?”
- I should talk to my doctor to see if there are some exercises or more effective pain management options than food.

Emotional hunger: Stress, boredom, loneliness, or negative thoughts can all trigger the feeling of hunger.

- If I find myself wanting to eat just so I feel better about a situation, I am comforting myself with food.
- Finding other ways to deal with those feelings can help control those emotions. Healthy responses can be getting enough sleep, practicing deep breathing, getting more physical activity, journaling, talking to a friend, or doing something you enjoy (like a hobby).
- If I am not able to change this on my own, maybe I should talk with a counselor or join a group like Emotions Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous or TOPS (Taking Off Pounds Sensibly).
- Use positive thinking to deal with negative emotions.