

the ANTI-DIET

health



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As you go to reach for that third snack before lunch, you begin to ask yourself, *Am I even hungry, or am I just bored?* Intuitive eating—otherwise known as the “anti-diet”—is about breaking down what it really means to listen to your body instead of relying on a strict set of rules that various diets often tell you to follow.



Julia Katcher, RDN, LDN, sums up this practice in one sentence: “Intuitive eating is a way to rebuild trust with yourself, your body, and food while eating and moving in enjoyable ways that both feel good and are good for you.” There are ten key principles that make up intuitive eating:

1. Disengaging from diet culture
2. Learning to recognize and honor your hunger
3. Stopping yourself from feeling guilty for indulging
4. Realizing there are no “bad” foods
5. Checking in with yourself to see when you are full
6. Enjoying the experience of eating a meal
7. Finding non-food-related ways to cope with emotions
8. Showing yourself compassion
9. Finding ways to get up and move that are enjoyable
10. Choosing foods that both taste good and are good for you




When asked which principle is the hardest for people to embrace, Katcher emphasized the struggle that people face when it comes to rejecting the diet mentality. “This is the principle where you decide you no longer need to lose weight or diet, and it can take years to get to this point,” she explains. “It’s scary for people to give up their dieting tools, whether that includes tracking food and drink on an app or weighing themselves every day, twice a day. It’s a form of control that can be hard to let go of.”

The concept of dieting dates back to ancient Greece, with ideals both good and bad that have landed us where we are today as a society, albeit a tad more modernized. When you google the term “diet,” you’re met with over a billion results. There’s a plethora of guidelines, companies, and experts telling you how you should live a healthy life, but what intuitive eating tells you is that you really only need to listen to yourself.

“Jumping from diet to diet isn’t sustainable,” Katcher says. “People tend to exclude some type of food

or food group and restrict calories, which is often coupled with, say, doing the same thirty-minute run on the treadmill that you loathe. But once these time-consuming efforts stop, the weight comes back—and then you’re on to the next fad diet.” Intuitive eating encourages you to think about your health in a long-term sense. Because it’s not a diet, and its principles are tailored to a more intrinsic way of viewing your health, intuitive eating has been shown to improve not only your physical well-being but also your psychological health.


Emotions play a large role in your eating habits, and the principles of intuitive eating are dedicated to reworking how you feel about what you’re putting into your body. The practice is heavily focused on the emotional side of eating. Culturally, tying emotions to food can be seen in events like birthdays and holidays, where we celebrate by cutting cakes, scooping ice cream, and passing out candy. Take Valentine’s Day, for example: you’re out to dinner with your significant other and you’re not hungry for a piece of chocolate cake, but you order it anyway because it’s almost the



predetermined thing to do on this romantic holiday. If you were practicing intuitive eating, this is where the second principle—honoring your hunger—would come into play. You wouldn't order the cake because it simply isn't what your body is telling you it needs. But if you are craving chocolate cake (and it doesn't need to be Valentine's Day), this practice would also encourage you to have a slice and, more importantly, to not feel guilty for doing so.

Creating a healthier relationship with food and activity is a lifelong journey for some people. Intuitive eating can help build a long-term mentality that enables you to feel freer over time and trust the decisions your body is telling you to make. This practice is not often described as a tool for weight loss—at least, that's not the purpose. It could, however, help promote weight maintenance, as well as help to improve eating habits, which plays into your overall self-esteem. "Instead of choosing avenues that could cause your weight to constantly fluctuate, you're making decisions that positively affect your physical health and psychological well-being," Katcher says. "Building healthy habits shouldn't be miserable!"

While emotions and eating are at the core of what intuitive eating is all about, don't think that moving your body can just be forgotten. Principle nine states how being active can help you on your health journey. "I don't focus on how moving your body may or may not change your body composition; I like to focus on how movement makes you feel: whether it gives you more energy or better-quality sleep, or improves stress levels," Katcher explains. "Together, we find that these are much stronger motivators when it comes to being active," a fact that she emphasizes when coaching her



clients. When you find ways to be active that you enjoy and couple it with intuitive eating, it can make for an outlet that helps shift your perspective about what it means to be healthy.

With no set meal plans, restrictions, or rules, there's less of a road map for embracing intuitive eating than when you look into other healthy living ideologies, but there are still plenty of resources to get started. Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, the original experts of intuitive eating and registered dietitians, cowrote *Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program That Works*, which goes into more depth on the ten principles. Christy Harrison, another registered dietitian who specializes in intuitive eating, hosts the podcast *Food Psych*, which delves deeper into what it means to adopt this practice.

Breaking free from restrictions you've put on yourself, negative feelings you've come to associate with certain foods, or strict ideals you've adopted about what it means to be healthy can be a challenge. Intuitive eating may not be the easiest practice to wrap your head around, but it is one that has long-term benefits and can help get rid of some of the pressure that often comes with choosing to embrace a healthier lifestyle. "As hard as it may be, trust the process," Katcher states. "You won't suddenly wake up one day, snap your fingers, and turn into an 'official intuitive eater.' Practicing intuitive eating provides you with lifelong skills that help you better understand your body's needs."

For more info, visit [intuitiveeating.org](https://www.intuitiveeating.org)

Follow Julia Katcher, RDN, LDN, on Instagram [@JuliaKatcher_RD](https://www.instagram.com/JuliaKatcher_RD)

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