

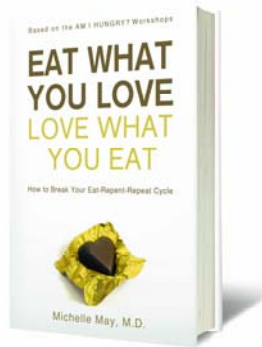


Hello!

I'm so glad that you've decided to take a few moments to download and read the first chapter of *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat: How to Break Your Eat-Repent-Repeat Cycle*. If you are craving a positive, sustainable, solution to yo-yo dieting that won't require deprivation, obsession, and punishing exercise, your time will be well spent.

If you're at all like me, you've done a lot of dieting so you may be a little skeptical. Could there really be anything that you haven't tried in some form or another? The answer to that question is an unequivocal, YES!

The title says it all: *Eat What You Love* promises that you can eat the foods you really enjoy fearlessly—without guilt, without paying penance, and without bingeing. *Love What You Eat* tells you how—by learning to eat the foods you love mindfully, intentionally, and attentively.



The first chapter, *In Charge, Not in Control*, lays the foundation by making it crystal clear why diets haven't worked for you or most other people. It will also open your eyes to a whole new way of thinking, using the model of the Mindful Eating Cycle®.

I believe that you'll see yourself in one or more of the four eating cycles described in this chapter. This insight alone will begin to shift your perspective, allowing you to see your choices in a completely new way. By the end of this chapter, you'll know whether this book is right for you. If you decide it is, I promise that the rest of *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* will be one *aha* after another!

*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat: How to Break Your Eat-Repent-Repeat Cycle* is available from our website: <http://www.amihungry.com/eat-what-you-love-book.shtml>, Amazon, and your favorite bookstore—if you don't see it, ask them to order more!

You'll also find other tools and resources on [www.AmIHungry.com](http://www.AmIHungry.com), including a free Eating Cycle Assessment, Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat Companion Cards, workbooks, articles, Am I Hungry? workshops, coaching, Am I Hungry? Mindful Eating Facilitator Training, and more.

Tens of thousands of people have already been transformed. I hope you're next!

Eat Mindfully, Live Vibrantly!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Michelle May, M.D.'.

Based on the AM I HUNGRY? Workshops

# EAT WHAT YOU LOVE LOVE WHAT YOU EAT

How to Break Your Eat-Repent-Repeat Cycle



Michelle May, M.D.

Advance Praise for *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat*

“*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* offers compelling and valuable insights into the psychology of eating . . . Navigating the shoals of nutrition doesn’t have to become a compulsive obsession or failed effort . . . Reading this book reminds and reeducates us how to find pleasure in these earthly delights.”

—Brian Luke Seaward, PhD, author of *Managing Stress* and *Stressed Is Desserts Spelled Backward*

“*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* is truly brilliant—I will definitely use it . . . to help end mindless and emotional eating. It is so easy to read that even the most tired dieter will love it!”

—Jeanne Rust, PhD, CEO and founder of Mirasol and Transformational Living.

“*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* will give readers a completely new mindset around food. In place of restriction, deprivation, and misery, they’ll discover flexibility, freedom, and joy.”

—Sharon Salomon, MS, RD

“Dr. May offers a lifeline for anyone who suffers from disordered eating patterns. She helps us answer the question, “what am I hungry for?” with confidence! If you are ready to change the way you think and feel about food, *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* provides a practical road map to creating healthier attitudes about food that will enable you to live a life free of emotional eating.”

—Diane E. Raymond, Personal Trainer, Founder of Blue Sky Gym and [www.AnywhereWorkout.com](http://www.AnywhereWorkout.com)

“Dr. May . . . truly understands . . . that for everyone who struggles with food and body image, it’s not about the food. Her . . . concrete tools to help others get off the yo-yo dieting rollercoaster are a healing balm that so many of us need.”

—Esther Kane, MSW, author of *It’s Not About the Food: A Woman’s Guide to Making Peace with Food and Our Bodies*

“Michelle May’s compassion and ability to explain the concept of mindful eating comes from her personal and clinical experience . . . [She] helps the reader pause to decipher the cause of unhealthy eating behaviors to . . . create a more nourishing eating style.”

—Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE, executive director, The Center for Mindful Eating

“Working *with* our human nature instead of fighting against it, *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* reverses the nonstop cycle of overeating through a process that will enrich your whole life, well beyond mere weight loss.”

—John Corso, MD, author of *Stupid Reasons People Die*

“Think. Nourish. Live. Eat. In four simple themes, *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* takes you gently through the not-so-simple task of eating when hungry, stopping when full, and loving every bite along the way . . . Rediscover one of the great pleasures of life—eating what you love without shame, guilt, or regret!”

—Elizabeth Patch, author and illustrator of *More to Love*

“Dr. May’s wise advice on creating a balanced lifestyle will surely help those who’ve struggled with their body image to step off the self-hatred treadmill and instead do what works for them . . . I recommend it for any parent who wants to model healthy body behavior for their kids.”

—Dara Chadwick, author of *You’d Be So Pretty If . . . Teaching Our Daughters to Love Their Bodies—Even When We Don’t Love Our Own*

“In *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat*, Michelle May demonstrates that living healthy *can* be fun and enjoyable.”

—Connie Diekman, MEd, RD, LD, FADA, director of university nutrition at Washington University in St Louis, former president of American Dietetic Association

“*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* will put mindful eating at the forefront of the obesity epidemic, replacing the restriction and deprivation messages that will never work.”

—Dr. Karen Wolfe, author of *Create the Body Your Soul Desires* and *The Conscious Body Method*

“*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* provides simple but powerful lessons to help everyone deal with over eating and improve physical activity . . . It will help readers achieve the same success I have witnessed in using Dr. May’s approaches in my research.”

—Wilson D. Pace, MD, FAAFP, director of American Academy of Family Physicians National Research Network

“From Dr. Michelle May comes this compassionate, soulful gift to all of us yearning to end restrictive eating and yo-yo dieting . . . Readers will revolutionize their relationship with food and . . . find their return path to an authentic and deepened sense of well-being.”

—Lori Gray Boothroyd, PhD, professional certified coach, coauthor of *Going Home*

“This is not a quick fix book but a life answer book. Dr. May provides a guide to help you stop reacting to other people’s rules about what you ‘should’ be doing, eating, and feeling . . . and asks, What do you think? This book opens up choices . . . to help you take your life back from the ‘tyranny of should.’”

—Pamela Swan, PhD, FACSM, associate professor of exercise and wellness, Arizona State University

“*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* is a must-read for anyone who struggles with the roller coaster of disordered eating.”

—Chevese Turner, CEO and founder, Binge Eating Disorder Association

“The diet industry will go under when yo-yo dieters finally discover the truth about weight management. No more rigid rules, strict exercise regimens, questionable drugs, or food substitutes.”

—Ruth M. Buczynski, PhD, licensed psychologist, president of The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine

“Michelle May explains how to reach a healthier weight, keep it off, and most importantly, live a vibrant life. It’s not only what you eat, but why you eat.”

—Joanie Greggrains, health & fitness radio talk show host, host/producer of *Morning Stretch* TV show

“*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* is a book that finally gets to the heart and soul of how to connect with food. Dr. Michelle May presents strategies and instinctive approaches to regain power over how, when, and why we eat.”

—Mary E. Daly, MA, health and nutrition educator

“Love, love, love this book! The strategies will empower you to reconnect with your body’s innate wisdom and ability to achieve balance. Look no further . . . the keys to lasting change are within these pages.”

—Michele Sutton, MA, CHES, wellness coach, health educator

“If you believe in rigid nutrition rules and no-pain, no-gain exercise regimens, you won’t like this book. Dr. May’s fresh approach is a greatly needed paradigm shift in how we think about food. Surely a revolution has begun!”

—Walter Plante, certified fitness nutritionist, author of the blog [kokobuzz.com](http://kokobuzz.com)

“May gives emotionally nutritious strategies for every single food-related thought and excuse our brains can dredge up . . . a stellar and arguably vital piece for anyone who constantly thinks about their body and food.”

—Michelle L. Butler, certified holistic health counselor, registered yoga teacher

“I use a similar philosophy when coaching my clients, but Dr. May’s eating cycle and strategies will make my job easier and more effective.”

—David W. Jensen, personal trainer and owner, PT Jenno, Perth, Australia

“*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* takes a holistic mind-body approach to one of the most pressing issues of our times.”

—Norma Richardson, holistic health counselor, The Body Knows Best

In view of the complex, individual nature of health and fitness issues, this book and the ideas, programs, procedures, and suggestions are not intended to replace the advice of trained medical professionals. All matters regarding one's health require medical supervision.

The author's role is strictly educational in the context of these materials. The author is not providing any medical assessment, individualized therapeutic interventions, or personal medical advice. Seek medical advice from your personal health care provider regarding your personal risks and benefits insofar as adopting the recommendations of this program.

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# CONTENTS

**Acknowledgments** ix

**Introduction** 1

## **PART 1: THINK**

**Chapter 1** In Charge, Not in Control 9

**Chapter 2** Trust Your Body Wisdom 29

**Chapter 3** It's Not About the Food 47

**Chapter 4** What Am I Really Hungry For? 63

**Chapter 5** Fearless Eating 91

**Chapter 6** Mindful Eating 109

**Chapter 7** Just Right 121

**Chapter 8** Self-Care Buffer Zone 135

## **PART 2: NOURISH**

**Chapter 9** Diets Don't Work 151

**Chapter 10** Rediscover Food 161

**Chapter 11** Drink and Be Merry 169

**Chapter 12** Clearing Carb Confusion 177

**Chapter 13** Fat Facts 191

**Chapter 14** Protein Power 203

**Chapter 15** It's the Little Things 211

**Chapter 16** A Flexible Approach to Self-Care 217

## **PART 3: LIVE**

<b>Chapter 17</b>	Born to Move	227
<b>Chapter 18</b>	Change Your Mind	239
<b>Chapter 19</b>	Lay Your Foundation	251
<b>Chapter 20</b>	Increase Your Stamina	259
<b>Chapter 21</b>	Increase Your Flexibility	269
<b>Chapter 22</b>	Increase Your Strength	283
<b>Chapter 23</b>	Challenge Your Body	295
<b>Chapter 24</b>	On Your Terms	305

## **PART 4: EAT**

<b>Chapter 25</b>	<i>I Am Hungry!</i>	319
<b>Menu</b>	Sunday Brunch	320
<b>Menu</b>	Rustic Grilled Pizza Party	322
<b>Menu</b>	Fiesta Night	327
<b>Menu</b>	The Healthy Grill	331
<b>Menu</b>	Family Night Pasta	334
<b>Menu</b>	Orient Express	337
<b>Menu</b>	One Pot Southwestern Stew	340
<b>Menu</b>	Light Dinner by the Fire	341
<b>Menu</b>	Mediterranean Small Bites Party	344
<b>Menu</b>	Celebration Dinner	348
<b>Menu</b>	Better than Fast Food	353
<b>Menu</b>	Main Dish Salads	357
<b>Appendix</b>	Health Notes	359
<b>References</b>		379
<b>About the Author</b>		397
<b>Index</b>		399

# INTRODUCTION

**D**o you love to eat? Do you feel guilty when you eat certain foods? Do you feel deprived when you don't get to eat what you want? Are you confused about what you're supposed to eat? Do you obsess about everything you eat? When you eat something you think you shouldn't, is it hard to stop? Do you think, "Oh well, I've already blown it. I might as well keep eating and restart my diet tomorrow"?

Do you say you love to eat but eat so fast that you barely notice the taste after the first few bites? Do you eat while you're doing other things, like watching TV, working, or driving? Do you feel stuffed at the end of a meal? Do you start thinking about food again soon after you're finished?

Do you eat because you're hungry? Do you even know what hunger feels like anymore? Do you eat because it's time to, because the food looks good, or because you're stressed, bored, or one of a thousand other reasons? Does eating make you feel better—but only for a little while? Does that sometimes lead to even more eating?

Do you think of exercise as a punishment for eating? Or do you exercise to earn the right to eat? Are you able to do all the things you want? What are you putting off until you lose weight? Have you forgotten that the purpose of eating is to fuel your life? Could these be a few of the reasons you continue to struggle with your weight? Could this be why diets just haven't worked for you—or most other people?

You have a choice to make. You can continue to try every diet that comes along, only to gain the weight back when you begin to feel hungry, bored, stressed, or deprived. Or you can learn how to eat what you love and love what you eat. The answers have been within your reach the whole time, but you've been reaching out instead of reaching in.



*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* will help you discover how pleasurable it is to eat mindfully, savoring every aspect of the experience. You'll *relearn* to trust your natural ability to eat just the right amount of food. And you'll meet your other needs—coping with stress or relieving boredom, for example—in more fulfilling ways. You'll learn to eat the foods you love fearlessly, without guilt or overeating. You'll find joy in movement and be amazed at your body's capacity to grow stronger and more flexible.

*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* is based on the Am I Hungry? Mindful Eating Workshops, a comprehensive program that has helped thousands of people change their fundamental relationship with food. By asking the deceptively simple question “Am I hungry?” you open the door to a much deeper awareness and understanding of yourself. Once inside, there's much to explore. You see, it's not just about *what* you eat; it's also about *why* and *how* you eat. In fact, for many of us, it's not about food at all.

This is not a diet book. You know that weight management really is more complex than simply knowing what to eat and how much to exercise. The failure of most diets proves it. My goal is to break this process into a series of manageable, sustainable steps that you can master one at a time.

This will be a very personal journey. You'll bring your own experiences, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs to the table. Every choice you make is an opportunity to experience and better understand why you do the things you do and then to choose differently the next time if it will serve you better. Let me emphasize that this will be a learning process. Perfection isn't necessary. Be kind and patient with yourself; the freedom and enjoyment you'll discover are well worth it.

*Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* has four parts: Think, Nourish, Live, and Eat. The first three parts each have eight chapters.

Part 1, *Think*, teaches you to ask yourself questions to gain awareness of why, when, what, how, and how much you eat, and where you invest your energy. As you become more fully aware of what you believe, think, feel, and do, you'll better understand how to get the results you want. You'll build a powerful foundation of important life and weight management skills and fulfilling ways of nourishing your body, mind, heart, and spirit—without dieting.

Though what you'll learn in part 1 really sets this program apart from all others, nutrition and physical activity are also important for vitality and health.

Part 2, *Nourish*, is written from an all-foods-fit perspective because I believe that nutrition information should be used as a tool, not a weapon. Ultimately, every decision is yours to make and is never wrong when you're eating mindfully. This concept may seem revolutionary; you likely are governed by diet rules that are rigid, confusing, or tainted with negative messages such as "eating fat is bad" or "exercise helps burn off calories when you cheat." As you let go of those restrictive and complicated rules, you may want additional nutrition information to help you make choices.

Part 3, *Live*, shows you how to add physical activity to your life, and life to your physical activity! I strongly believe that small changes gradually integrated into your lifestyle are far more powerful than one huge temporary overhaul. These small, focused suggestions are probably very different from the "all-or-nothing" approach of your past, so please be open to giving them a try.

Part 4, *Eat*, includes great recipes for some of my family's favorite dishes. My husband, Owen, is a professional spa chef, and we have a passion for making nutritious taste delicious. I'll refer you to those recipes throughout the *Nourish* chapters. (All references to specific recipes are flagged with an image of a plate, as shown here.)



Am I Hungry? workshops are available nationwide and are presented by hundreds of licensed Am I Hungry? facilitators. We've worked with thousands of participants, and I've included some of their stories, either word for word, or as composites of several people with similar experiences. Most of the names have been changed.

Their stories illustrate key concepts, but more important, as you read them I hope you'll see that you're not alone and that there's hope. I also open each chapter with my own personal experiences. Let me start now by sharing how I came to do this work.

## MY STORY

I was overweight from an early age. Picture a girl with red hair, lots of freckles—and chubby. My parents didn't have a lot of money, so we didn't waste food; besides, there

were starving children in Africa. My athletic, skinny younger brother could, and would, eat anything that wasn't nailed down, so I made sure to get my share first. My grandmothers were both wonderful cooks, and I learned early on that food was love. My mother, on the other hand, was slender and dieted to stay that way. She was the only one in our family who never ate her baked potato. I believed that when I grew up, I wouldn't get to eat potatoes anymore either.

When my parents began having marital problems, I found comfort and security in eating. Soon after they divorced, a girl at my new dance school teased me about being fat, so I quit taking lessons and gained more weight. Through my teens I spent most of my free time hanging around with my friends at a fast-food joint or eating in front of the TV set. I still remember how embarrassed and guilty I felt when my stepdad realized that my friend and I had eaten a whole package of cookies—thirty-six to be exact.

I always put a lot of pressure on myself and then used food to relieve the stress. It usually worked—at least for a little while. In the long run, though, my main coping mechanism itself became a major source of stress for me. I was trapped in a vicious cycle.

Subtle and not-so-subtle comments and upsetting shopping trips to find clothes made it clear I had to do something. The stage was set. For the next twenty-plus years, I was on one diet after another. I had my favorite: the one that worked—as long as I stuck to it. I tried to be good, but I always ended up cheating. I discovered that exercise helped, but I used it mostly as a way of paying penance when I was bad. I was ashamed of my body, ashamed of my eating, and ashamed of my cheating. I developed features of an eating disorder that helped me cope with my painful relationship with food. Without realizing it, I was caught in another vicious cycle.

Ironically, despite the fact that I wasn't able to stick to a diet, I successfully finished college, medical school, and a family medicine residency. I eventually found myself in the position of advising my patients to lose weight. Most of them didn't seem to fare any better than I had. That was little consolation.

I felt discouraged and helpless. How could I tell someone to do something I hadn't been able to do myself? I knew it was time to try again, but it didn't seem fair; my husband and children never dieted, and they never struggled with their weight. They ate whatever they wanted, but they rarely ate more than they needed.

Did they just have a better metabolism? That was probably part of it. I knew mine was a mess after years of overeating and dieting. Did they have more willpower? No. I

doubt they could follow a diet for very long either. But there was something else, something fundamentally different about the way they thought about food. I realized they didn't really think about food at all—unless they were hungry.

Could the answer really be that obvious? Could I learn to listen again to my body's innate wisdom to guide my eating? My little voice said, "I can't stand the thought of another diet. I'll try anything else."

It was surprisingly simple, but it was not always easy. After years of trying to follow other people's rules about food, ignoring hunger, and eating for all sorts of other reasons, it was difficult to trust my body and my instincts. Gradually, I developed a more mindful, satisfying way to eat and maintain a healthy weight naturally.

Something else completely unexpected happened along the way. I discovered parts of myself I had lost—or I didn't even know existed. I found peace, health, and wholeness. I also discovered a purpose for my life and a passion for helping others find wholeness, too.

**Eat Mindfully, Live Vibrantly!**

**Michelle May, M.D.**

## CHAPTER 1

# IN CHARGE, NOT IN CONTROL

I know the feeling. “I can’t take it anymore—I just have to lose this weight.” Whenever my little voice told me I was too fat, I’d buy the latest diet book, join a gym, or head back to a meeting.

“Time to get back in control,” my little voice said. I weighed myself and calculated how long it would take to get to my goal weight if I lost two pounds a week. I cleaned out my refrigerator, my kitchen cabinets, and my desk drawer. I threw away (or finished off) the chips and cookies and started eating celery sticks for snacks. I read every label so I’d know what I could eat and what I shouldn’t. I took my lunch to work every day and tried out new healthy recipes on my family. (“Oh no, Mom’s on a diet again!”) I drank my eight glasses of water every day and got up early almost every morning to walk. “This feels great!” my little voice said.

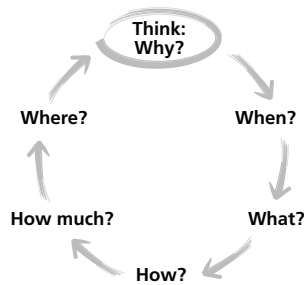
The weight started to come off. I’d lose three or four pounds the first week—never mind that part of it was water or even muscle. I already felt thinner—and a little smug. As I watched everyone else in the break room scarfing down doughnuts, I’d think, “If they had self-control like me, they’d know those things are bad and they’d resist them, too.” Eventually, someone would notice I’d lost weight, so I’d talk about my latest diet. They’d tell me about theirs, and everyone within earshot would chime in with their favorite diet story. Soon the conversation would drift to food and eating—our favorite topics.

Then a little while later came the inevitable weigh-in when I didn’t lose as much as I thought I should. I vowed to try harder, and I did. But my little voice said, “This isn’t

worth it.” I reminded myself about all the reasons I wanted to lose weight. When I saw someone eating ice cream, my voice said, “It’s not fair.” Then one morning my alarm went off for my walk, and my little voice said, “This is too hard.” I turned off the alarm, rolled over, and went back to sleep.

Later that day I bought a bag of candy at the store “for the kids.” I got out to the parking lot and my little voice said, “You’ve been so good; you can have one piece.” I ate a piece and the voice continued, “You can walk a little extra tomorrow; have another one.” I ate one more, then another, and by the time I got home, half the bag was gone. The voice said, “You already blew it. You might as well eat the rest so you won’t be tempted when you go back on your diet tomorrow. Besides, how are you going to explain away half a bag of candy?” So I finished it off and buried the empty bag in the bottom of the garbage can.

Then the little voice changed. “I can’t believe you did that after how hard you’ve worked! You couldn’t stick to it, just like all the other times.” I knew that at any given moment, I was just one piece of candy away from being right back where I’d started. The voice screamed at me, “You’re so out of control. What a loser!”



## WHY DO I EAT?

Maybe you want to lose a few pounds, or maybe you want to lose a lot.

Anything might have triggered your decision: planning a Caribbean cruise, dreading your twentieth high school reunion, or feeling winded as you try to outrun your toddler headed toward a busy street. Maybe you have nothing left in your closet that fits, or you feel uncomfortable sitting in a chair with armrests—or you can't sit in a chair with armrests anymore. Maybe your doctor told you the reason your knees hurt all the time is that they're carrying a heavier load than they were designed for and your joints are wearing out. Maybe she told you that you have high blood pressure or diabetes, or that you will if you don't do something about your weight.

Maybe you just can't stand the thought of another diet. You know that before long, whatever motivated you in the first place won't seem that important anymore. Your willpower becomes want-power, and your little voice will whisper, "Maybe next time it'll be different." You'll go back to eating like before until something happens to give you that feeling again, the one that says, "I have to do it this time."

And now that you are reading this book, your little voice might be saying, "But why should this time be any different? You know you won't be able to do it."

But you *can* do it because this book really is different. In fact, it may even seem a bit too different. Your little voice might say, "No dieting? How's that going to help? You're already out of control. What you really need is willpower and some strict rules to whip yourself into shape!"

Deep down inside, don't you believe there has to be a better way?

There is.



## **STRATEGIES: RECOGNIZING YOUR EATING PATTERNS**

Look at the following statements to see which, if any, apply to you. (To take the Eating Cycle Assessment online and receive a detailed report, please visit [www.AmlHungry.com](http://www.AmlHungry.com).)

- I am hungry all the time.
- I am never hungry.
- I can't tell when I'm hungry.
- I know I'm not hungry, but I eat anyway.
- I am starving by the time I eat, so I'll eat anything I can get my hands on.
- I eat by the clock.
- I think about food all the time.
- I love food and eating too much to be at a healthy weight.
- I think healthy food is boring.
- I use food to cope with stress and other feelings.
- I am an emotional eater.
- I eat when I'm bored.
- I eat when I'm stressed.
- I eat when I'm nervous.
- I eat when I'm sad.
- I eat when I'm angry.
- I eat when I'm lonely.
- I eat when I'm tired.



- I reward myself with food.
- I comfort myself by eating.
- I celebrate every special occasion or milestone by eating.
- I don't know why I eat.
- I often eat until I'm stuffed.
- I have trouble stopping myself when I eat "bad" foods.
- I have tried a lot of diets.
- I am either dieting or eating too much.
- I think thin people have more willpower than I do.
- I think thin people have better metabolisms than I do.
- I feel guilty about eating certain foods.
- I have a love-hate relationship with food.
- I sometimes ignore hunger in order to control my weight.
- I eat on a schedule even when I'm not hungry.
- I decide ahead of time what I'm going to eat for the entire day.
- I avoid certain foods because they're fattening.
- I am confused about what I should be eating.
- I am frustrated that "experts" keep changing their minds about what we should eat.
- I hate to exercise.
- I don't really like exercise, but I do it so I can eat what I want.
- I make myself do more exercise if I've eaten too much.
- I dread the thought of going on another diet, but I just don't know what else to do.

Take this quiz again after reading this book to see how much has changed!

## Hungry for Answers

Long-term weight management isn't about being *in control*. It's about being *in charge*. To understand why this distinction is so important, consider the differences between people who don't struggle with their weight, people who are overweight, and people who are always on a diet. What characteristics and traits do these people have? Why do they eat? What role does food play in their lives? Think of their eating patterns—what, how often, and how much do they eat? How physically active are they?

People generally fall into eating patterns that I call Instinctive Eating, Overeating, or Restrictive Eating. Many of us have a combination of these patterns.

## Instinctive Eating

Think of someone who naturally stays within her healthy weight range. Think about a person who seems to do this effortlessly rather than someone who exerts incredible willpower and self-control. Perhaps you're thinking of your spouse, a friend, a child, or even yourself—before you began gaining weight or struggling with food. These are people who stay slim without a great deal of effort, like Tom and his wife, Angie.

I never worry about my weight; I just eat when I'm hungry and stop when I start feeling full. My wife, Angie, is the same way. We take gourmet-cooking classes together, but we really don't think or talk about food all the time like a lot of people we know. I honestly don't have a problem turning down great food if I'm not hungry; I mean, what's the point? We're both pretty high energy; we play in a softball league and love to hike on the weekends. I think we weigh about the same as when we met in college, give or take a few pounds. I've never been on a diet; they seem crazy to me. I love food and I can eat pretty much whatever I want, but I've made changes as I've gotten older and more health conscious. I wish I could tell you what I do to manage my weight, but to be honest, I just don't have to think about it all that much. Frankly, it's a little hard for me to understand why overweight people don't just stop overeating.

## Overeating

Think of somebody you know who struggles with overeating. It may be you or someone you know well. Sarah is fairly typical of a lot of people I've worked with who struggle with their weight.

Paul and I are both overweight, so I'm starting to worry about our health. Paul has high blood pressure now, and my doctor said my blood sugar was borderline high. I just don't feel very healthy and I'm tired all the time.

It seems like we're thinking and talking about food, eating, and dieting all the time. We joke that we're star members of the clean plate club; the all-you-can-eat buffet loses money on Paul. I often eat until I'm stuffed—but I always manage to find room for dessert. I guess I never thought about whether I was hungry. I don't think I actually ever get hungry, but Paul says he's hungry all the time. We just eat because it's mealtime or because something looks good—whether we're hungry or not.

I guess I reward myself, comfort myself, and entertain myself by eating. I hate feeling so out of control around food. We've been on lots of different diets, but one of us always ends up cheating, so we eventually just quit. I usually gain more weight than I lost. I know we should exercise, but it's really hard; it makes me feel like I am being punished for overeating. I just wish I was one of those skinny people who has more willpower and a better metabolism than I do.

## Restrictive Eating

Now think of someone you know who always seems to be on a diet. You probably know a lot of people like this: people who try to manage their weight by chronically restricting their eating and exercising almost compulsively. Here's how Karen described it.

I know I drive my husband, Mark, crazy because I'm always trying to lose that last ten pounds. I weigh myself every morning and sometimes after I eat. Those numbers on the scale can make or break my day, but the truth is, I think I'm

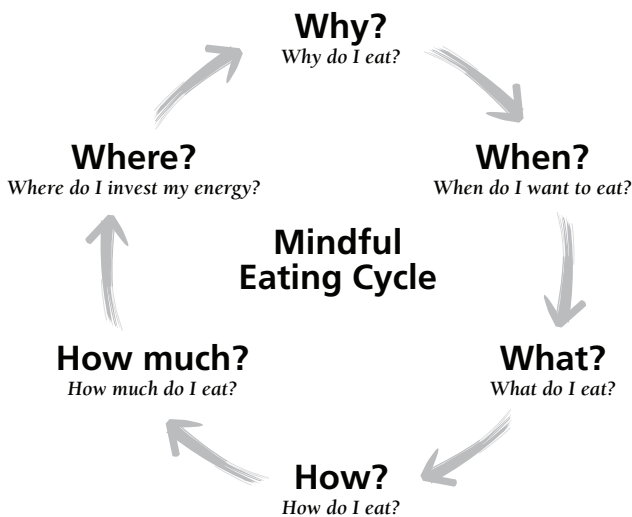
too fat no matter how much I weigh. I'm always on one diet or another. I think I have every diet book ever written. I felt like I was starving on some of them, so now I eat every three hours so I don't get hungry and lose control.

The funny thing is, I think about food all the time; I worry a lot about what I should or shouldn't be eating. Mark teases me that I don't eat real food—just chemically altered diet-friendly versions of food. I sometimes secretly eat something I shouldn't then end up eating whatever I can get my hands on because I've blown it. I know I need to stay on a diet since it's the only way I can control myself around bad foods. When I cheat I have to starve myself or force myself to exercise more to make up for it. I almost never miss my daily exercise regimen because I'm too worried I'll gain weight. I just wish Mark had more self-control and would eat healthier.

Do you recognize your eating pattern in one or more of these stories? Let's take a closer look at each one, using the Mindful Eating Cycle as a way to understand how you make conscious or subconscious decisions about eating, and how each decision affects the other choices you make.

## THE MINDFUL EATING CYCLE

The Mindful Eating Cycle consists of six stages that answer six main questions.

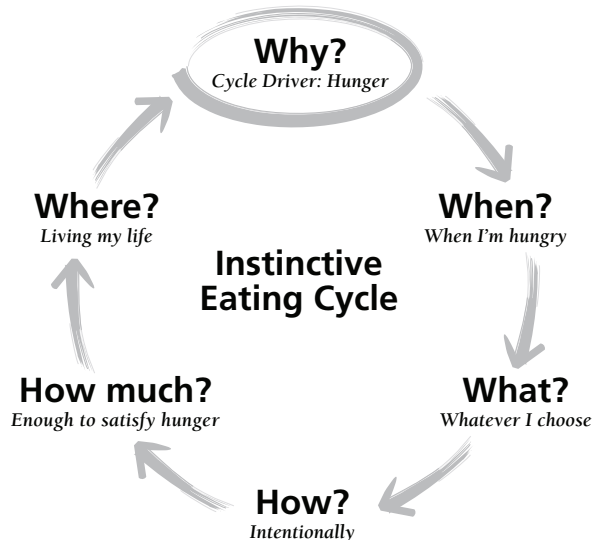


<b>WHY?</b>	Why do I eat? In other words, what is driving my eating cycle at any given time?
<b>WHEN?</b>	When do I want to eat? When do I think about eating? When do I decide to eat?
<b>WHAT?</b>	What do I eat? What do I choose from all of the available options?
<b>HOW?</b>	How do I eat? How, specifically, do I get the food I've chosen into my body?
<b>HOW MUCH?</b>	How much do I eat? How much fuel do I consume?
<b>WHERE?</b>	Where do I invest my energy? That is, where does the fuel I've consumed go?

Let's apply the Mindful Eating Cycle to the three main patterns of eating to better understand what's really going on.

## Instinctive Eating

Here's how someone who eats instinctively answers the six fundamental questions in the Mindful Eating Cycle.



- WHY?** Your cycle driver is hunger. In other words, hunger is your primary cue for eating. Hunger guides you to decide when and how much to eat.
- WHEN?** When your body needs fuel, it triggers the sensations that tell you you're hungry. You decide when to eat based on how hungry you are, but you also consider other factors like convenience, social norms, and the availability of appetizing food. When you occasionally eat even though you're not hungry, you don't feel guilty, just full—so you don't eat again right away.
- WHAT?** You eat whatever you want. Your choices are affected by your preferences and your awareness and degree of concern about nutrition information, as well as what foods are available. You naturally seek balance, variety, and moderation in your eating. In the Instinctive Eating Cycle, you don't use rigid rules to decide what to eat; therefore, you don't judge yourself for what you eat. Eating is usually pleasurable, but food doesn't hold any particular power over you.
- HOW?** You eat intentionally and with purpose. Since you're eating to satisfy hunger and nourish your body, you pay attention to the food and your body's signals.
- HOW MUCH?** You decide how much food to eat by how hungry you are, how filling the food is, how soon you'll be eating again, and other factors. When your hunger is satisfied, you usually stop eating—even if there's food left. You recognize that being too full is uncomfortable and unnecessary.
- WHERE?** Your energy goes toward living your life. Your physical energy can be directed toward your activities during work, play, exercise, and even rest. Your mental energy can be focused on your daily tasks and goals. Your emotional and spiritual energy can be focused on your relationships and purpose. Any leftover fuel you consume is stored until it's needed.

Once the fuel you've consumed is depleted or stored, the signs of hunger return, triggering your desire to eat again. The Instinctive Eating Cycle repeats

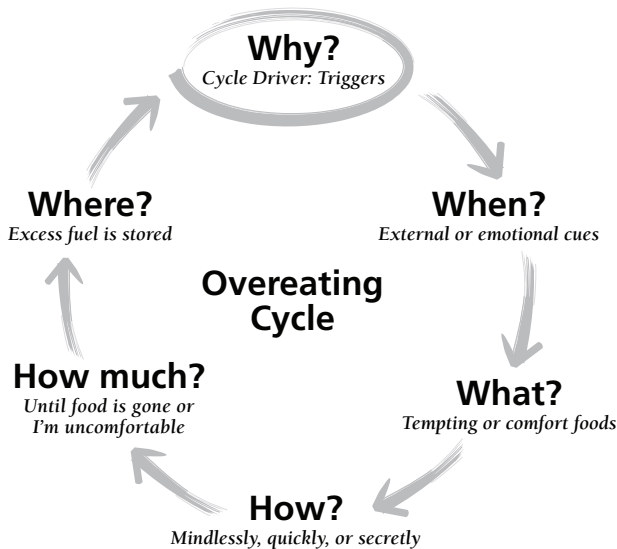
**MINDFUL MOMENT:** When you are eating instinctively, you eat what you love, but you don't obsess about food because you don't need to. Instead, you trust your body to let you know when and how much to eat.



itself, perhaps three or four times a day or every few hours, depending on what and how much you eat and how much fuel you need on a particular day.

## Overeating

Here's how someone who is in a pattern of overeating answers the six fundamental questions in the Mindful Eating Cycle.



### WHY?

Your cycle drivers are your triggers: that is to say, eating provides temporary distraction or pleasure. For example, if the trigger is boredom, eating distracts you and gives you something to do for a little while. If the trigger is a big tray of brownies, eating several

might be pleasurable for a few moments. The distraction or pleasure is initially satisfying and therefore drives the Overeating Cycle.

**WHEN?**

Your desire to eat is triggered by conscious or unconscious physical, environmental, and emotional triggers. Examples of physical triggers are thirst, fatigue, or pain. Environmental cues such as the time of day, appetizing food, or certain activities associated with food may trigger your urges to eat. Emotions such as stress, boredom, guilt, loneliness, anger, or happiness may also trigger eating. Sometimes hunger triggers the initial urge to eat, but then environmental and emotional cues lead to overeating. If you're in the habit of eating for all these reasons, when do you feel like eating? All the time!

**WHAT?**

The types of food you choose to eat in response to triggers other than hunger are more likely to be foods that are convenient, tempting, and comforting. For example, if you're at a ball game, you might eat a hot dog, a jumbo pretzel, or a plate of nachos even if you aren't hungry. If your trigger is stress, you might choose chocolate or potato chips. It's less likely you'll choose nutritious foods in your Overeating Cycle since you're not eating in response to your body's physical needs.

**HOW?**

In the Overeating Cycle, you're more likely to eat mindlessly, automatically, quickly, or secretly. You may eat, or continue to eat, whether you're hungry or not. You might unconsciously grab a handful of candy or nuts from a bowl as you pass by. You might eat while you're distracted watching TV, driving, working, or talking on the phone. You might eat secretly or quickly to finish before someone catches you. You might feel guilty about eating, and therefore you aren't able to fully enjoy it. Eating this way is not very satisfying physically or emotionally.

**HOW MUCH?**

If hunger doesn't tell you to start eating, what tells you to stop? In an Overeating Cycle, the amount of food you eat depends on how much food you've been served or how much is in the package. You might eat until you feel bad or until you're interrupted. All too often, you feel uncomfortably full, miserable, or even numb instead of content and satisfied after eating.



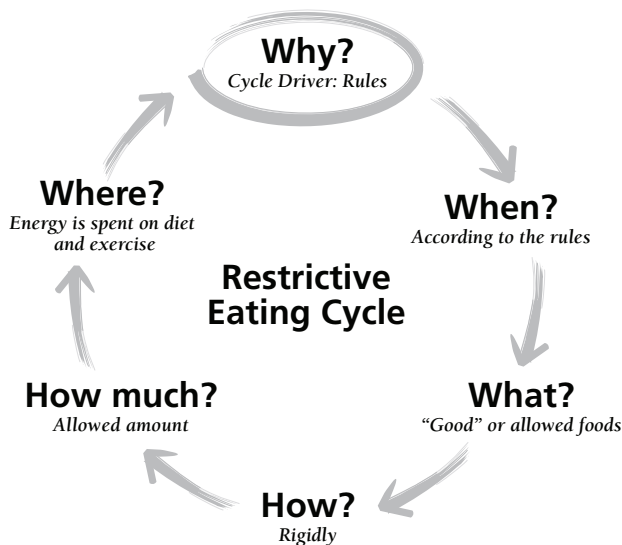
**WHERE?**

When you eat food your body didn't ask for, your body has no choice but to store it. The excess fuel you've consumed is saved for later in the form of body fat. You might feel self-conscious or less energetic, and as a result, you might not feel like being physically active. Perhaps you avoid certain experiences like dating, going on vacation, or buying clothes that look and feel good because you want to lose weight first. Perhaps you feel bad about yourself for being overweight and don't ask for that raise you deserve or set appropriate limits with other people, leading to even more emotional triggers and more overeating.

When you ignore your true needs and eat instead, you feel disconnected and out of control. When you eat for reasons other than hunger, the distraction and pleasure are only temporary; consequently, you have to eat more to feel better, feeding a vicious cycle.

**Restrictive Eating**

Here's how someone in a restrictive eating pattern answers the six fundamental questions in the Mindful Eating Cycle.



**WHY?** Your cycle drivers are rules that determine when, what, and how much to eat. The rules may come from an “expert,” or they may be self-imposed. Your decisions about eating are controlled rather than intuitive. When you’re in a Restrictive Eating Cycle, the number on the scale or how well you’ve been following the rules determines how you feel about yourself on a particular day.

**WHEN?** The rules determine whether or not you’re allowed to eat: for example, “Eat every three hours,” or “Never eat after 7:00 p.m.” These rules serve the purpose of externally limiting your intake. In the first example, eating by the clock prevents you from getting hungry; theoretically, your eating should be easier to control. Prohibiting eating in the evening prevents overeating due to triggers like watching television or loneliness. However, these rules place artificial constraints on your eating that don’t necessarily honor your body’s natural hunger rhythms—and they don’t address the real reasons you want to eat in the first place.

**WHAT?** You should eat only the “good” foods that are allowed on your diet. You may have to resist your favorite “sinfully delicious” foods or avoid situations and places where your forbidden foods would tempt you. Some diets allow you to eat any food you want, but higher-calorie foods are treated as special. These powerful foods must be substituted, calculated, earned, or eaten only on “cheat days.” In the Restrictive Eating Cycle, choosing the right food is very important because when your choice is good, you’re good. But when your choice is bad, you’re bad.

**HOW?** Following the rules may require you to be very structured or even rigid in your eating. However, always having to choose “good” foods may cause you to feel deprived, while choosing “bad” foods causes you to feel guilty.

**HOW MUCH?** You eat the allowed amount since the quantity of food is predetermined by the rules. This may require weighing, measuring, counting, or using some other external way to determine how much food you can have or how much food you should eat. These rules prevent you

from eating too much food, or perhaps from not eating enough, based on the assumption that you don't have the ability to consume an appropriate amount of food without following a set of strict rules.

## **WHERE?**

The Restrictive Eating Cycle requires a great deal of mental and emotional energy. As in the Instinctive Eating Cycle, your body will use whatever fuel it needs for work, play, exercise, and rest, but if you're eating more "healthy" foods than your body needs, the excess will still be stored. If you're significantly under-eating, your body may attempt to conserve as much fuel as possible by lowering your metabolism. You may spend a lot of your energy figuring out how to get the most food while still staying within the confines of your diet. Furthermore, while exercise is important for overall health and fitness, in the Restrictive Eating Cycle, exercise is sometimes used to earn the right to eat, to punish yourself for overeating, or to pay penance for eating a bad food.

While other people admire your willpower and self-control, many of your thoughts, feelings, and activities revolve around food, exercise, and weight. Although you're dependent on rules to drive your Restrictive Eating Cycle, those rules mainly focus on food and exercise without adequately addressing why you want to eat in the first place. For many people, the rules consume their energy and distract them from meeting their true needs and living their lives fully.

## **THE EAT-REPENT-REPEAT CYCLE**

When you eat due to external or emotional triggers, the temporary distraction or pleasure you receive can act like an engine that drives your cycle. When you decide that going on a diet is the only way to regain control and stop yourself from overeating, you switch from your Overeating Cycle to your Restrictive Eating Cycle.

In your Restrictive Eating Cycle, triggers may still drive your cycle, even though you eat only those foods that are allowed on your diet. For example,

when you feel stressed, you might eat a lot of veggies or popcorn instead of chips. You still aren't coping effectively with stress, and you're still overeating in response to cues other than hunger. Eventually, you begin to feel deprived, hungry, or worn out by all the time and energy it takes to follow the rules. So you cheat, feel guilty, and give up, shifting back into your Overeating Cycle, once again eating your favorite foods in response to the triggers you never dealt with in the first place.

It's common for people to shift back and forth between overeating and restrictive eating. You might switch cycles over the course of weeks or months, or you might move rapidly from one cycle to the other in the same day or even in the same meal. You start out with good intentions but quickly lose control.

This pattern is known as yo-yo dieting, but when the Overeating and Restrictive Eating Cycles are intertwined, I refer to it as the eat-repent-repeat cycle. You move wildly from one extreme to the other, feeling powerless to change without understanding why.

## A Pendulum Instead of a Yo-yo

As you look at your own eating cycles, you may realize that when you're overeating, you usually feel *out of control*. When you're dieting, you finally feel *in control*—but it's usually too difficult (and boring!) to sustain permanently.

The problem is that a yo-yo is either up or down. You're either tightly wound up in rules or you're unraveling and heading toward the bottom again. Even if you decide you don't want to spend the rest of your life in one of these two extremes, there's no real in-between. The common advice to “follow a healthy lifestyle” usually means exercise and watch what you eat—not terribly helpful if you've been trying unsuccessfully to do that for years.



**MINDFUL MOMENT:** In the eat-repent-repeat cycle, when you eat what you want, you feel guilty; when you eat what you “should,” you feel deprived. Either way, you're almost never at peace with your choices.

Instead of a yo-yo, I prefer to think of a pendulum. A pendulum, while still conjuring up images of extremes, will find a gentle arc somewhere in the middle as it loses energy. What I mean is that when you finally stop wasting so much of your energy on overeating and dieting, you'll naturally settle into a more comfortable, centered space, freeing up your energy for more enjoyable, productive, and fulfilling activities.

## **Freedom and Flexibility**

That smaller, gentle arc of a pendulum is instinctive eating. Instead of the extremes of trying to stay in control or spinning out of control, you're *in charge*. At any given time, you have the freedom and flexibility to mindfully fuel yourself the way you want to. You were born with the natural ability to effortlessly manage your weight this way.

If you're exposed to food when you're not hungry, you may take a passing interest in it, but you probably won't eat a significant amount because you'd feel uncomfortable afterward. You can eat anything you want when you're hungry, so you don't have to spend a lot of time deciding in advance what you're going to eat. You can consciously choose to follow a healthier diet, but you don't expect yourself to be perfect. You truly enjoy food because you don't feel physically or emotionally uncomfortable during or after eating. And when you're satisfied, you go on living your life without thinking about food again until your body tells you to.

Eating instinctively doesn't mean eating perfectly. You might eat for pleasure, convenience, or a special occasion like a birthday party, even if you aren't hungry. You might choose comfort foods when you feel stressed or go out to dinner to reward yourself. You might even overeat sometimes because the food tastes so good that you decide it's worth feeling uncomfortable afterward. All these are part of eating instinctively when you're mindful and in charge of the decisions you make.

## **RELEARNING TO EAT INSTINCTIVELY**

To resolve your weight and food issues without endless dieting you must restore your Instinctive Eating Cycle. Instead of following strict rules created

by experts, *you* can become the expert on meeting your needs. I'll teach you how to use the fundamental information delivered by your hunger cues to determine when, what, and how much you need to eat. I'll also help you understand why you want to eat for reasons other than hunger. This awareness will give you the opportunity to meet your true needs more effectively.

Imagine what it will be like when you reestablish physical hunger as your primary cue for eating! You'll become mindful of your body's messages about when to eat, what kind of food satisfies you, and how much food you need. You'll have the tools to manage your weight no matter where you are or what you're doing—celebrating the holidays, doing business over lunch, or relaxing on vacation.

You'll discover that it's possible to balance eating for nourishment with eating for enjoyment. There won't be any more good or bad foods to worry about. You won't be required to count calories, exchanges, fat grams, or points. You won't be told to eliminate your favorite "fattening" foods. You won't need to tolerate tasteless food substitutes. You won't have to avoid certain restaurants or cheat on your birthday. And you won't need an endless supply of willpower and self-control. Eating will become pleasurable again, free from guilt and deprivation.

Once you relearn to recognize and respond appropriately to hunger, you'll see whether there are other needs you've been trying to satisfy by eating. You'll learn to meet those needs in positive and constructive ways so food can serve its proper function—to nourish you and fuel a fulfilling life.

When you learn to manage your eating by listening to your instincts, you'll begin to trust your ability to take charge of other areas of your life as well. When you're *in charge* instead of trying to stay *in control*, you'll feel more motivated to make certain eating and activity choices—not because you have to, but because you want to. Little by little, you'll free yourself from your focus on food and weight and discover new tools and energy for a more balanced, satisfying, and vibrant life.

With your renewed ability to eat instinctively, you won't need to be in control because you'll be in charge, like Lori explained in this e-mail.

**MINDFUL MOMENT:** Instead of following strict rules created by so-called experts, you will become the expert on meeting your needs.



I feel great. I'm eating whatever I want, and I usually only eat when I'm hungry. Not everything I eat is perfect, but I eat a lot healthier now. I still have desserts and sweets when I really want them. I can't even imagine how I used to be able to eat so much and feel so full all the time. I still don't like to exercise indoors, but I'm more active now. I can't wait to get out and start hiking as soon as the weather changes. It feels so good to be able to wear clothes that I haven't been able to wear for years—and to cross my legs again! I feel like I'm back in charge of my life.

Your eating cycles provide important information about why, when, what, how, and how much you eat, and where you invest your energy. When you're in an Overeating Cycle, your triggers drive the cycle. When you're in a Restrictive Eating Cycle, your rules drive the cycle. When you're in an Instinctive Eating Cycle, your body's need for fuel drives the cycle. Each decision affects the rest of your decisions. Over the next seven chapters, we'll explore each decision and you'll relearn to eat instinctively without overeating, deprivation, or guilt.