



Tips for Giving Yourself Unconditional Permission to Eat & Enjoy Food

What does it really mean to neutralize food and truly have unconditional permission to eat? When we have worked through this phase of healing our relationship with food and body, we eat:

- What we want
- Without conditions of how much and how often
- With the intention of being in full view of others (no false food fronts)
- Free of guilt or shame—before, during and after eating
- With a blank slate—no making up for things done in the past, no last suppers

Here are Some Tips for Getting Started:

1. Reclaim your right to eat and enjoy food by working to accept that your body requires food as part of the contract of being alive. Nothing you do gets you out of this contract! Food will start to take its rightful place in your life when you are consistently getting enough enjoyable foods to eat.
2. Neutralize food—make the apple emotionally equivalent to the chocolate bar, the fish & chips emotionally equivalent to the salad with grilled salmon, etc. To do this, it helps to remember that you do not gain or lose weight, nor do you become healthy or unhealthy, from one meal or one day of eating.
3. Make a list of your favorite foods and edit it over time. Give yourself unconditional permission to eat and enjoy these foods. Some people start with things that are less scary and work toward scarier foods over time.
4. Remember the habituation effect: the more a person is exposed and allowed to eat a food, the less desirable it becomes over time. Without the habituation experience, food remains exciting and scary, and the belief that we must be controlled remains locked in place. If you don't eat foods to habituate to them, you will continue to experience the cycle of restriction and backlash eating.
5. Start to pay attention to whether or not you like the foods you are eating. If you don't like something, why are you eating it? Give yourself permission to stop.
6. Take risks with your eating so you can learn from your experiences. Every eating episode is an opportunity to practice awareness, connection and choice. You do not become an intuitive eater by reading about it. It takes practice and patience. Set the intention to practice this some of the time.
7. Cultivate the ability to observe what happens with kindness and curiosity—do your best to notice without judgment. Challenge your assumptions about eating a particular food.
8. Sit down when you eat and pay attention to your food while you are eating—notice the colors, textures, aromas, and flavors.
9. Give your body the consistent message that food is available by eating regular meals and snacks.
10. Create a food bag and carry it with you at all times. Include a variety of flavors, textures and amounts. When you get hungry, look in the bag, notice what draws your attention, and eat with pleasure and gusto.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before you eat:

- What do I want? What sounds good?
- Do I want something warm or cold? Chewy, crunchy or creamy? Savory, sour or sweet? Light or hearty?
- How hungry am I? How long do I need this food to last?
- How would it best be enjoyed?
- How am I going to feel after I eat this food? Do I want to feel this way right now?

While you are eating:

- Do I like it? Does it taste good?
- Does it taste as good as I thought it was going to be?
- What would make it taste even better? Make it more enjoyable?
- When does it stop tasting good?
- When does my attitude toward the food shift from pleasure and joy to work?

When you are starting to feel full:

- How much more do I need to feel satisfied?
- What do I want my last bite to be?
- What can I do to signify that I'm done? (Push plate away, place napkin and utensils on plate, sit back in chair and push away from table)

An Important Quote from the Intuitive Eating Book:

“During this phase, the bulk of your eating may be foods that are heavier in fat and sugar than you’ve been accustomed to—although you may have been eating large quantities of these foods secretly or with guilt. The way you eat during this time will not be the pattern that you will establish or want for a lifetime. You will notice your nutritional balance is off kilter and you may not feel physically on top of things during this time. This is all normal and expected. You must let yourself go through this stage for as long as you need. You are making up for years of deprivation, negative self-talk and guilt. You are rebuilding positive food experiences, like a strand of pearls. Each food experience, like each pearl, may seem insignificant, but collectively they make a difference.”