

Exploring Why You Eat

Eating healthy is more than just the foods you choose to eat. It also has to do with:

- When you eat
- Where you eat
- How you eat
- Why you eat

About 75% of overeating is caused by feelings, not because of hunger. This means that many of us use food to cope with our feelings.

How do you deal with feelings of anger, conflict, stress, loneliness, boredom or sadness?

Emotional eating is eating in response to stressful feelings. It may lead to a habit of using food to feel better.

Do you eat because you are tired or to help you fall asleep?

Night eating is when you eat 25% or more of your daily food after dinner 2 or more nights per week. You feel like you need food to fall asleep or stay asleep. This could be a sign you are not eating enough during the day as well.

Do you find comfort in food?

When you have these feelings, eating something sweet or salty can give a sense of comfort. This feeling often turns into guilt or shame. Put a stop to emotional, nighttime and boredom eating. Become a mindful eater.

How do you change your eating pattern?

Find a time to listen and talk about why you or your child eats and what the feelings are. Find healthier ways to cope and deal with emotions and stress:

- Write about it.
- Talk with a safe person.
- Go for a walk.
- Take a nap.
- Read a book.
- Take a drive.
- Put on some music and dance.
- Work in the garden.
- Seek help from a mental healthcare provider.

Meet basic needs first.

- Get enough sleep.
- Make time for regular meals and snacks.
- Plan time for exercise. This helps the brain release chemicals that decrease stress and improve mood.

Learn what it feels like to be hungry and what it feels like to be satisfied.

Use a hunger scale:

1. Starving: you may feel weak or dizzy
2. Extremely hungry: irritable
3. Feeling hungry enough for stomach to growl on occasion
4. Feeling mildly hungry
5. Feeling satisfied: neither hungry nor full
6. Mildly full: no discomfort
7. Feeling satisfied: you could eat more but it would be uncomfortable
8. Full enough for moderate discomfort
9. Extreme discomfort
10. Stomach feels tight and full, sick

Find old and new ways to take care of you and your child:

- Listen to soothing music.
- Take a yoga class.
- Get a massage.
- Learn to meditate.
- Find time for your favorite fun things to do.
- Eat regularly throughout the day.
Keep yourself from getting down to a 1 or 2 on the hunger scale.

Who to Call

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: **(608) 890-5500**

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at: **(608) 287-2770**

You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2022 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#407