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Eating Instinctively

By Laura Ciocan

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I start from the premise that eating instinctively means eating healthily. I strongly believe that the body has the capability of transmitting the brain accurate information regarding its nutrition necessities: a moderate amount of food, and only foods that are benefic for health.

The problem is that most of these natural eating instincts are lost on the way. Usually, during the growing process, adults project their unhealthy habits on children, offering them a range of foods that are not always best choices. As adults, we have formed our eating habits, more or less healthy and usually worry about our children's eating habits, but their instinct is often correct.

My theory has as starting point my own experience as a child, when I recall rejecting foods that I found too greasy or too deeply fried. Observing babies and children behaviour towards feeding might give us an idea about what eating instinctively means. Small children that did not have the time to get influenced by adults, have the natural eating instinct unspoiled. Contrary to adults' opinion about eating, they want to eat many smaller meals and only when they are hungry.

To support my thesis, I resort to the recommendation made by specialists in baby nutrition who advise on feeding babies at request, not forcing a program on them, thus a meals program will be generated by their inner scheduler according to their needs.

So, from children we learn that one should eat when hungry and in the amount strictly required by body necessities, not driven by social cues such as eating out with friends even if not hungry or taking a lunch break just because it's noon.

Another reason supporting the theory towards a simpler way of eating is that based on the foods offered by nature. Every living creature finds its subsistence resources in nature. Theoretically, foods of natural origin in their unspoiled state should suffice for ensuring men a healthy existence. I am not a sustainer of some paleolithic diet or anything like this, but we cannot not make reference to the simple

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way of eating of old times. It is a fact that in modern times modern and more complex diseases have developed (such as the increased incidence of tooth decay, allergies, various diseases of the digestive system such as diverticulitis), most in tight connection to modern diets. Man was not built for so many refined and super-refined processed foods. The great discovery – cooking – was just a means to make foods more digestible, but nowadays we experience an extreme version of modern eating, one abounding in processed foods and pre-prepared meals.

Eating in a balanced proportion raw foods (vegetables, fruit) and cooked meals is definitely healthier. Also healthy choices are those of foods in an unrefined state, as close to natural as possible.

Towards a healthier way of eating a reconsideration of our diet is needed. The thing is, it is harder to re-educate ourselves than to acquire from scratch, as first we need to forget everything we know, get rid of all the unhealthy habits and then to rediscover eating and it is even harder to resist so many temptations scattered all over, just at hand to grab!

Laura Ciocan writes for

where you can find more information about the
dietary options.

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What You Need to Know to Lose Weight Without Dieting

By Michelle May M.D.

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If your commitment to eat right, exercise, and lose weight always seems to lose its steam, you are not alone! Weight problems are not just about what you are eating, but why you are eating in the first place.

To see what I mean, ask yourself these questions. Do you think about food and eating more than you think you should? Do you feel guilty when you eat certain foods? Do you have trouble passing up tempting food even if you aren't hungry? Do you often eat when you are bored, stressed, lonely, or angry? Do you eat differently in private than you do in public? Do you fluctuate between dieting and eating too much?

If you answered yes to most of these questions, you have probably discovered that dieting hasn't really solved the problem. To help you understand why, let's take a look at three different eating styles: Over

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Eating, Restrictive Eating, and Instinctive Eating.

In "Over Eating" people eat because it is mealtime or because something looks good – whether they are hungry or not. They may also eat to distract themselves or cope with stress and emotions. They may reward, comfort, or entertain themselves with food. Their weight tends to go up and down depending on whether they are off or on their diet.

In "Restrictive Eating," a person controls his or her weight by dieting. They decide when, what, and how much to eat based on the rules of the latest diet they are following. Since diet rules are always changing, they sometimes feel confused about what they should eat. They think of food as either "good" or "bad"—and they think of themselves as good or bad, depending on what they ate.

Now think about someone who doesn't struggle with his or her weight. If you are having trouble thinking of someone like that, think of a baby or a young child. I call this "Instinctive Eating." These people just seem to know when, what, and how much food they need. When their body needs fuel, they get hungry, triggering an urge to eat. They simply stop eating when their hunger is satisfied. Most of them really like to eat and seem to be able to eat whatever they want. However they will turn down even delicious food if they aren't hungry.

You might believe that a person who eats instinctively has been blessed with willpower and a great metabolism. But the truth is, we were all born Instinctive Eaters. It's just that many of us "unlearned" our natural ability to know how much to eat. The good news is that you can relearn those skills if you are willing. I did! Here are some important steps to get you started.

1. Let go of the idea that there is a perfect diet that will finally solve your problems. The answer lies within you.

2. Whenever you have an urge to eat, instead of focusing on the food, first ask yourself, "Am I hungry?" Remember that hunger is a physical feeling. It is not the same thing as appetite, cravings, or the desire to eat.

3. If you are hungry, remember that there are no "good" or "bad" foods. You are less likely to overeat certain foods if you know that you can have them again when you really want them.

4. Stop eating when the hunger is gone but before you feel full, even if there is food left. Give up your membership to the Clean Plate Club!

5. If you are not hungry, ask yourself if something in your environment triggered your urge to eat and what you could do to reduce the trigger or distract yourself from it. For instance, could you put the candy dish out of sight or do something else for a while until you are actually hungry?

6. If there was an emotional trigger, ask yourself what you could do to better cope with that emotion. For instance, if stress triggered your urge to eat, could you try a relaxation exercise instead?

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7. Don't expect yourself to be perfect—it is not possible or even necessary.

By relearning to eat instinctively, you will see that eating to satisfy hunger is pleasurable and that it is good to eat foods that you enjoy. You will find that meeting your other needs in appropriate ways will bring balance and joy to your life. By learning these important skills, you will reach a healthier weight and a healthier lifestyle—without dieting!

Michelle May, M.D. is a practicing Board Certified Family Physician with expertise in the cognitive-behavioral aspects of weight management. She is the author of *Am I Hungry? What To Do When Diets Don't Work* in collaboration with a Registered Dietitian and Psychologist. Visit her website www.AmIHungry.com for more ideas on managing weight without dieting.

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