

You and Your Eating

You and Your Eating How *Shoulds* and *Wants* Come Together

Ellyn Satter, MS, RD, LCSW, BCD

www.ellynsatter.com

Almost everybody today feels upset and anxious about eating. The gap is widening between what people think they should do and what they want to do—and what they are able to do—with eating. Many say focusing so much on health takes all the [pleasure out of eating](#)

To close your personal gap between the shoulds and the wants, make your priority feeding yourself well. Stop trying to be so virtuous and instead emphasize eating delicious and wholesome food at predictable times. Once you remove the negativity, you will be surprised at how much [better you eat!](#)

TRUST yourself [Your body knows how much you need to eat](#) You have within you the ability to know when you are hungry and when you are full. You can trust that ability by going to the table hungry and eating in an orderly fashion until you are ready to quit. Then you can quit, knowing that another meal or snack is coming and you can eat again. If you eat until you have truly had enough (until your mouth says enough, not just your stomach), eating will take its place as only one of life's great pleasures.

Be positive and dependable about feeding yourself Have meals at regular times, and plan snacks so you can get comfortably through to mealtime without being famished and preoccupied with food. Don't spoil your appetite with grazing. Plan ahead to provide yourself with both good and good-for-you food. But beware of the overdeveloped conscience that comes from bouts with dieting and concern about health. Some people avoid planning as a way of getting around their conscience.

Have food you enjoy Do you order broiled fish, then give in to cheesecake when the dessert tray comes around? You aren't alone. Too many people today are being virtuous about their meals, having low-fat, low-salt, low-calorie, low-who-knows-what-else. Then, between times, virtue goes out the window and they give in to good-tasting, "forbidden" food. This isn't slothful or indulgent. It's just natural. Eating is not a moral issue. It is simply one of life's great pleasures. If you can't get pleasure directly from eating, you have to sneak.

Emphasize variety The principles of a good diet are variety, moderation and balance: Unfortunately, people today feel so guilty and negative about eating that even these neutral guidelines come across judgmental and withholding. Variety means "eat a lot of food you don't like." Moderation means "don't eat as much as you are hungry for." Balance means "put together meals you'd rather not eat." It's all very dreary. To keep out of the negativity, seek variety and let the moderation and balance take care of



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themselves. Cultivate an attitude of curiosity and anticipation. Know that you can trust your hunger and appetite to help you manage your eating.

Avoid the extremes It doesn't work to pressure yourself with eating. If you try to get yourself to eat less than you really want, you'll become preoccupied with food and overeat. If you try to avoid foods you really like, you will become preoccupied with them and overeat on them when you can. If you try to get yourself to eat a lot of something you don't really like, you'll become revolted by it and undereat.

Give yourself permission to eat Have meals, and know you can go to the table hungry and eat until you are satisfied. Have foods you enjoy at those meals, not just foods that you serve because you should. Reassure yourself there will be enough and that you can eat another time, rather than scaring yourself by trying to be restrictive. Out of this permission will come control. Forbidden foods won't be so enticing when you can have them any time. Virtuous foods will be more appealing if you don't have to eat them. Learn to like new food by sneaking up on it [like a child does](#). Look, but don't taste, taste, but don't swallow. (What do you think napkins are for?)

Stop being phobic about sugar and fat The problem with high sugar is calories with no nutrients attached. The problem with high fat is all the concern about prevention of heart disease. Despite all the extreme messages, prevention of disease through fat restriction is just a hope, it is [not a guarantee](#). To hedge your bets against disease, it is worth being moderate in fat use. It is not worth being slavish and guilt-ridden. It's easy to overeat on high-fat and high-sugar foods because they taste so good! But eating a lot is not the only way to appreciate delicious food. Learn to savor it. Slow down and pay close attention to what is in your mouth. Do keep eating until you get as much as you want. Don't use slow eating to trick yourself into eating less. Reread the section, Avoid the extremes.

Be disciplined, but not negative Discipline is part of taking care of yourself. It takes discipline to set up regular and predictable meal times, to plan the shopping list, to get the food in the house, to do the cooking and cleanup, to set aside the time to tune in on the meal—the list goes on. But if you get negative or heavy-handed on the discipline, it will feel like prison rather than caretaking. If you have to take a vacation from it, you are being negative.

Give your body a break Take good care of yourself with eating, take good care of yourself with activity, and let your body weigh what it will. That weight is likely to be stable and right for you. Your weight is not optional. Your body has a preferred weight, and you have the food-regulation mechanism, inclinations to move and metabolism to support that preferred weight. You can be healthy at any weight if you take good care of yourself with your [eating and activity](#).

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