
Noticing Signs of Fullness

What is Fullness?

Fullness is your body's way of telling you that it has enough of fuel for that meal or snack. Noticing comfortable signals of fullness requires paying close attention during the meal and may include pausing during the meal to ask yourself what your fullness level is. Fullness can be experienced on a range from comfortable or pleasant fullness to an overly full or unpleasant level of fullness.

Barriers to Comfortable Fullness

Some habits make it hard to notice fullness and stop eating before reaching a point of discomfort. These barriers may include:

- Distracted eating
- Habit of eating until the food is gone
- Eating for emotional reasons (to cope with anxiety, depression, boredom, etc.)
- Waiting to eat until you are extremely hungry
- Not knowing when your next meal or snack will be available
- Habit of eating past the point of comfortable fullness

The ability to stop eating when you are comfortably full depends on many factors, including whether you have allowed yourself to experience satisfaction by eating any of the foods that you enjoy. Otherwise, the fear that this is the last time you will get to eat this food can lead to eating until you are uncomfortably full. Getting curious about how fullness feels in your body will help you to recognize how pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral fullness feels to you.

Pleasant or neutral fullness may include:

- Stomach begins to feel some pressure and tightness
- Food may not be as tasty as when you started the meal
- Better mood or focus
- Less thoughts about food, cravings have been satisfied
- May have more energy, may feel a little bit of sleepiness

Unpleasant fullness may include the following:

- Painful and bloated feeling in your stomach
- Feeling nauseous or sick to your stomach
- A feeling of tiredness and significant sleepiness
- Uncomfortable tightness in your midsection
- May feel painfully full, there may be far less desire to eat

Mindful eating is important for noticing fullness. Ask your Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) for ideas on how to eat more mindfully. If you often find yourself

stopping at the painfully full, sick, or nauseous point of fullness, it would be best to discuss this further with your medical team or RDN. If you find that you feel overly full after eating a very small amount of food, or if you never feel full, it would be best to discuss this further with members of your medical team, including an RDN.

Using the Hunger Fullness Scale

This scale is a tool to help you learn more about your hunger and fullness signals throughout the day. Consider rating your hunger and fullness before and after meals and snacks.

Hunger Fullness Scale

Rating	Hunger and Fullness Sensations
0	Painfully hungry. An urgent and intense hunger.
1	Ravenous and irritable. Feeling anxious to eat.
2	Very hungry. Looking forward to a hearty meal or snack.
3	Hungry and ready to eat without urgency.
4	Subtly hungry, slightly empty.
5	Neutral. Neither hungry nor full.
6	Beginning to feel emerging fullness.
7	Comfortable fullness. You feel satisfied and content.
8	A little too full.
9	Feeling very full or too full. You feel uncomfortable.
10	Painfully full and stuffed. You may feel nauseous.

Summary

Paying close attention to your body’s messages as you eat your meals can help to learn – for the most part – to eat to a pleasant point of fullness. It can also help you ensure you are meeting your nutritional needs (not eating too little nor too much for your body). This skill takes time and practice to learn. Remember, some pressure and tightness in the stomach is normal and this feeling will pass as your body digests the food. If noticing your fullness is new for you, give yourself plenty of grace as you learn this new skill. Practice, not perfection, is the goal!