
Noticing Signs of Hunger

What is Hunger?

Hunger is your body's way of telling you that you need to eat. It is a biological mechanism that allows a consistent supply of energy to ensure survival. Hunger is often experienced as a desire to eat and may involve certain physical sensations and emotions.

Feelings of Hunger

Feelings of hunger may be experienced as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Waiting too long to eat may lead to feeling unpleasant hunger. Letting ourselves constantly get to this state of hunger can cause periods of eating past comfortable fullness and may lead to unintended health consequences, and/or the development of disordered eating behaviors. One of the ways that we can prevent the onset of unpleasant signs of hunger is to be mindful of emerging signs of hunger.

Noticing Signs of Hunger

Everyone is unique. We may not all experience hunger the same way. Begin to get curious and notice how your body feels at different times between meals and snacks. Only you know what pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral hunger feels like in your body.

Pleasant hunger may include:

- Beginning to think about food and eating
- Looking forward to a hearty meal or snack
- Gurgling or growling in the stomach
- Feeling subtly hungry, slightly empty
- Noticing increase in salivation when thinking about food or when around food

Unpleasant hunger may include the following:

- An intense and urgent desire to eat, feeling ravenous
- Experiencing stomach pain or intense stomach aching
- Feeling fatigued, weak, and/or tired
- Noticing changes in emotional state (such as feeling anxious, angry, or irritable)
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling unsteady or faint

Neutral hunger is described as feeling neither nor hungry nor full.

Consider eating when you notice emerging signs of hunger instead of waiting until when you have crossed the point from possibly pleasant or neutral hunger to unpleasant hunger. This can help limit how frequently you find yourself eating past comfortable fullness. Notice times when you experience unpleasant hunger and think of ways to plan to practice honoring your hunger sooner.

If you frequently find yourself waiting to eat until you feel dizzy, faint, weak, or lightheaded it would be advised to seek the guidance of a Registered Dietitian (RD) and/or speak with your medical team.

Using the Hunger Fullness Scale

You can use the hunger fullness scale as a useful 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

Noticing less obvious signs that your body requires food can be a new skill to learn for most people. If this is a new practice for you, be gentle with yourself as you become more aware of how you feel. By taking the time throughout the day to honor your hunger and need for nourishment you may notice you start to feel better.

Additionally, everyone is unique and may have different hunger cues; there is no wrong or right way to experience hunger. The more you listen to your body, the more you will begin to hear and experience the subtler signs of hunger! It is a practice; not something to perfect.