



Hunger & Fullness



Liverpool University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

(Department Name)

Aintree Site

Lower Lane, L9 7AL Tel: 0151-525-5980

Royal Site

Prescot Street, L7 8XP

Broadgreen Site

Thomas Drive, L14 3LB

Royal & Broadgreen Tel: 0151-706-2000

What is hunger?

Hunger is a physical feeling, a signal that your body needs food. It is described as a gnawing, rumbling emptiness in the stomach and happens 4-5 hours after eating. It is important to eat when physically hungry, as going too long without food can lead to overeating.

We need to eat when we are physically hungry, but we often eat for other reasons too.

Non – hunger eating

Some of the reasons we eat when not physically hungry include:

- If feeling lonely, bored, stressed, anxious, annoyed or tired - this is often referred to as comfort eating.
- As a reward for something or as a way of relaxing e.g. at the end of the day
- In social situations e.g. where it might seem rude to refuse if someone else is offering food.
- Due to habit e.g. having a biscuit with a cup of tea.
- Confusing hunger with thirst i.e. eating when we really need a drink but don't recognise this.
- Craving a particular food e.g. chocolate - when physically hungry the thought of most foods is attractive whereas with non-physical hunger it is often particular types of foods that are craved.

It is very common to eat when not hungry but this is likely to cause weight gain if it happens a lot. When trying to manage your weight it is important to recognise if non hunger eating is a problem for you and if it is then look at ways to try and do it less.

Hunger and fullness scale

It may help to monitor how hungry and full you usually feel before and after eating. You can rate your hunger/fullness on a scale of 1-10.

10	Absolutely stuffed to the limit. Possibly feeling sick.
9	Uncomfortably full and possibly need to loosen your belt
8	Feeling full. Pressure on your stomach. You may have gone slightly beyond satisfied.
7	Comfortable. You have had just enough food to feel satisfied, and not stuffed. This amount of food leaves you feeling energised.
6	You are approaching fullness.
5	Neutral, neither hungry nor full. If you are eating, you are not satisfied yet.
4	Just beginning to feel hungry. You need to wait a little longer before you eat but make sure you will be able to eat soon. (This is a good time to start food preparation and cooking.)
3	Hungry and definitely ready to eat. Hungry enough to fully enjoy your food and confident that it will taste great. But not so hungry that you feel desperate to eat. This is a good time to start eating.
2	You are very hungry, but your thinking is clear. You can still make healthy food choices.
1	Totally empty. You may be feeling faint, shaky or irritable and can barely function. Possibly feeling low in energy and moody. Absolutely desperate to eat. Hunger and food consume your thoughts.

Ideally you should be aiming to eat at around point 3 and stop eating at point 7. Most people need to eat approximately every 4-5hours during their day to prevent them getting too hungry.

If you feel hungry

- Ask yourself if you have eaten in the last 4 hours.

If no:

- Plan what you are going to eat for your next meal or snack
- Prepare your food
- Eat it slowly and enjoy it

If yes:

- Consider if you are eating for a reason other than hunger- if yes can you wait until your next planned meal or snack time?
- Consider something else you might be able to do other than eat (a distraction)
- Wait 20 minutes for the craving to subside
- If you feel like you still want to eat, plan what you are going to eat, prepare it and eat it slowly

What can I do to distract myself from eating?

A distraction can include anything that takes your mind off eating. Many people report that activities where they have to use their hands are the most effective at distracting them from eating. If the first time you try a distraction it doesn't work don't give up try again with another distraction.

Below are some examples of things that other people have found helpful:

- Going for a walk
- Visiting, phoning or texting friends or family
- Writing a letter/ e-mail
- Using the computer
- Having a bath or shower
- Cleaning the house or car or doing some DIY or gardening
- Having a hot (low energy) drink in a favourite mug or sparkling water in a wine glass
- Doing a hobby, such as knitting, sewing, cross stitch, jigsaw puzzles, drawing or painting or model making.
- Reading a book or magazine
- Watching a DVD or something interesting on television
- Listening to music or playing an instrument
- Doing crosswords or other puzzles
- Treating yourself to a manicure or face mask

Mindful eating

When you do eat it is important to focus fully on your food, it has been shown that people who do this eat less than those who are distracted by another activity whilst eating (e.g. watching TV). Some things that may help are:

- Sitting at a table to eat and using a knife and fork rather than eating some foods with your hands
- Turn off the TV/computer or put away your phone or any other distraction whilst you are eating
- Think about where you are on the hunger scale before you eat, half way through and at the end of your meal
- Think about how your food looks as well as the tastes and textures of your meal.
- Chew your food several times e.g. aim to chew each mouthful approximately 20 times



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Tel No: 0151 529 2906

Email: interpretationandtranslation@liverpoolft.nhs.uk