

CHAPTER 1

Decision Point: Why Do I Eat?

Am I hungry? This deceptively simple question can be the key to ending your struggle with weight and food—*without* dieting. Essential to survival, hunger is your cue to take care of your body’s natural and fundamental need for energy and nutrients. If you are frustrated with your weight or struggle with making food choices, you may not be using this basic skill to determine when, what, and how much to eat.

Here are comments from people who came to us for help with their weight and food issues. Do any of these statements sound familiar?

- I am hungry all the time.
- I am never hungry.
- I can’t tell when I am hungry.
- I know I am not hungry but I eat anyway.
- I am starving by the time I eat, so I’ll eat anything I can get my hands on.
- I eat by the clock.

- I think about food all of the time.
- I have trouble stopping myself when I eat “bad” foods.
- I often eat until I am uncomfortable.
- I have tried a lot of diets.
- I don't have enough willpower to stick to a diet.
- I love food and eating too much to reach a healthy weight.
- I sometimes ignore hunger in order to control my weight.
- I feel guilty about eating certain foods.
- I am confused about what I should be eating.
- I am either dieting or eating too much.
- I am an emotional eater.
- I use food to cope with stress and other feelings.
- I have a love-hate relationship with food.
- I dread the thought of dieting but I don't know what else to do.

If you struggle with your weight or your eating habits, you may be having difficulty listening to your own internal signals of hunger and satiety. *Hunger* is your body's signal that it needs nourishment, while *satiety* is your body's signal that it does not need food. How a person responds to these signals often separates those who have difficulty with their weight from those who seem to eat whatever they want and maintain a healthy weight.

Your Eating Cycle

To understand why hunger and satiety are so important, consider the differences between people who don't struggle with their weight, people who are overweight, and people who are always on a diet. What characteristics and traits do these different groups of people have? Why do they eat? What role does food serve in their lives? Think of their eating patterns—what, how often, and how much do they eat? How physically active are they?

Certainly, people are various sizes and shapes, have genetically different metabolisms, and have different levels of activity. But many of the people in these groups share common characteristics. We refer to these different eating styles as Instinctive Eating, Over Eating, and Restrictive Eating.

Instinctive Eating: First, think of people who stay within their healthy weight range naturally. Try to picture people who seem to do this effortlessly, rather than people who appear to exert incredible willpower and self-control. Perhaps you are thinking of your spouse, a friend, a child, or even yourself—before you began gaining weight or struggling with food. These are people who stay slim without a great deal of effort.

Angie and Tom eat when they are hungry and stop eating when they are satisfied. They don't think or talk about food all of the time. They take gourmet-cooking classes together and really enjoy eating just about whatever they want. However, they don't have any trouble turning down even delicious food when they aren't hungry. They seem to have a lot of energy; they play in a softball league and love hiking on the weekends. Their weights remain stable, going up and down in a narrow range. They never diet but are willing to make changes in the way they eat if they learn new information that will improve their health. Angie and Tom don't really know what they do to stay slim. They have difficulty understanding why overweight people can't just stop overeating.

Over Eating: Now think about people who are overweight—maybe you or someone you know well. Two people we worked with are typical of many others with weight struggles.

Alicia and Paul are both overweight and are starting to worry about their health. Their doctor told them that Alicia's blood sugar was too high and that Paul had developed high blood pressure. Alicia and Paul think and talk about food, eating, and dieting all the time. Alicia and Paul admit that they are not really aware of their hunger.

Alicia says she can't tell when she's hungry but Paul says he's always hungry. They eat because it is mealtime or because something looks good—whether they are hungry or not. They joke that they are star members of the clean plate club and that the all-you-can-eat buffet loses money on them. They often feel stuffed after a meal—yet they still manage to eat dessert. They reward, comfort, and entertain themselves by eating. Alicia and Paul both say they feel guilty and out of control around food. They experiment with the latest fad diets, but they always end up cheating and giving up. Of course, that makes them feel bad, especially since they usually end up gaining even more weight than they lost. They don't feel very healthy and complain of feeling tired all the time. Exercise is hard for them and they tend to think of it as a punishment for their overeating. They think slim people have more willpower and better metabolisms than they do.

Restrictive Eating: Now think of people who always seem to be on a diet. You may know a lot of people like this—people who manage to keep their weight down by chronically restricting their eating and exercising compulsively.

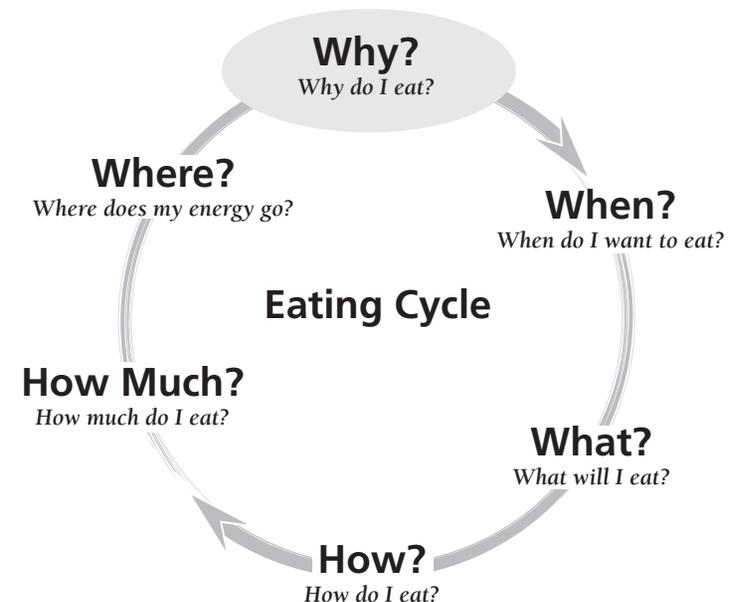
Karen drives her husband Mark crazy because she is always struggling to lose those last ten pounds. She weighs herself daily, sometimes more than once a day. Most of the time, she thinks she is too fat no matter how much she weighs. The numbers on the scale often determine how her day goes. Since she is always trying to lose weight, she often won't allow herself to eat—even when she is hungry. She disconnects from her hunger by eating only predetermined amounts and types of food at specific times, depending on the rules of the diet she is following. Karen seems preoccupied with thoughts of food; in fact, she thinks about it all the time. She worries a lot about what she should or shouldn't be eating. Mark teases her that she doesn't eat real food—just their chemically altered diet-friendly versions. Secretly, she sometimes eats a “bad” food and ends up overeating or bingeing on it. This reinforces in

her mind that dieting is the only way to maintain control over her urges to eat those “forbidden” foods. She punishes herself for cheating by starving herself later or forcing herself to exercise more. She rarely misses her daily exercise regimen because she worries that she will gain weight. Karen thinks Mark should have as much self-control and willpower as she does.

Do you recognize your eating style in one or more of these descriptions? Let's take a closer look at each one using The Eating Cycle. The Eating Cycle is a way of understanding how you make conscious or subconscious decisions about eating, and how each decision affects the other decisions you make. Each Decision Point in the cycle represents a choice that you as an eater make about consuming food and burning it as fuel.

The Eating Cycle

Why? Why do I eat? In other words, what drives my Eating Cycle?



When? When do I want to eat? When do I think about eating and when do I decide to eat?

What? What will I eat? What food do I choose from all of the available options? What do I decide to fuel my body with?

How? How do I eat? How, specifically, do I eat the food that I have chosen?

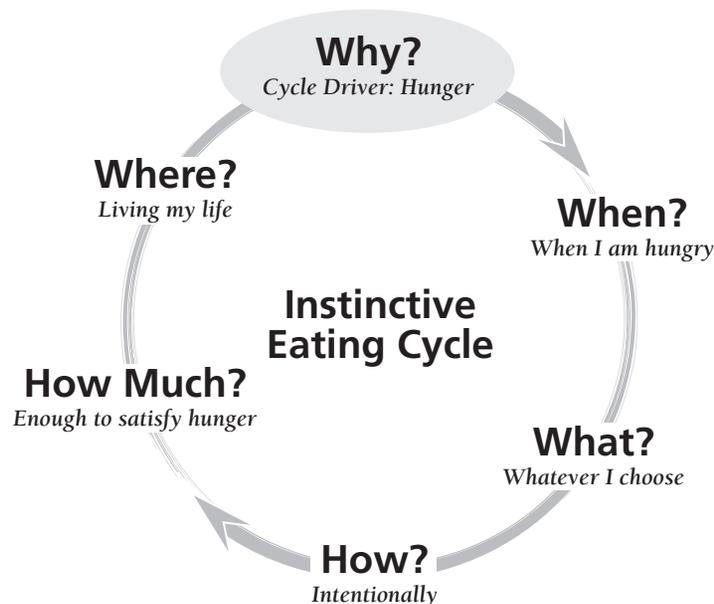
How Much? How much do I eat? How much fuel do I give my body when I eat?

Where? Where does my energy go? Once I have chosen and eaten the food to fuel my body with, where do I spend that energy?

The Instinctive Eating Cycle

Why? The Cycle Driver is hunger. When you are in an Instinctive Eating Cycle, hunger is your primary cue for eating. When your body needs food, it triggers the sensation of hunger. Hunger guides you to decide when and how much to eat.

When? When you are hungry. Your body lets you know it needs fuel by sending you hunger signals. Once you recognize



the need for fuel, you must decide whether to eat depending on the circumstances, your preferences, the availability of food, convenience, and other factors.

What? Whatever you choose. You are able to select food from all of the available options to fuel your body. Your food choices are affected by your preferences, your awareness of nutrition information, and what foods are available. In the Instinctive Eating Cycle, strict diets aren't used to decide what to eat and food does not hold any particular power over you.

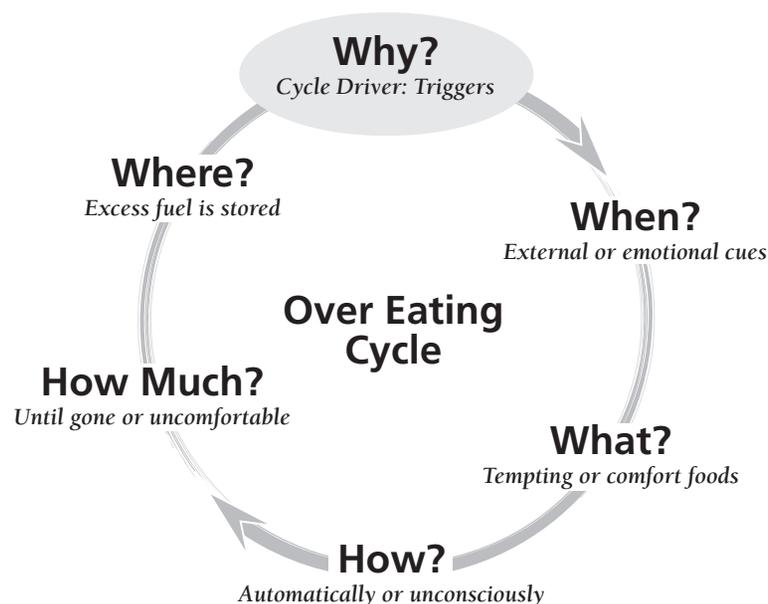
How? You eat intentionally. When you are in an Instinctive Eating Cycle, you eat with purpose. Usually that purpose is to satisfy hunger but even when the purpose is enjoyment, eating holds your attention so you are able to experience the maximal pleasure.

How Much? You eat enough to satisfy hunger. You decide how much food to eat by how hungry you are, how filling the food is, how soon you will be eating again, and other factors. When your hunger is satisfied you stop eating—even if there is food left. You recognize that being too full is uncomfortable and unnecessary.

Where? Your energy goes toward living your life. As you go about your day, your body freely uses the food you ate for the fuel it needs during work, play, exercise, and even rest. Any leftover fuel is stored until it is needed. Once your readily available fuel is depleted or stored, the symptoms of hunger develop, triggering a desire to eat, and the cycle repeats itself.

The Over Eating Cycle

Why? The Over Eating Cycle is driven by triggers. Eating in response to these triggers may give you temporary pleasure or distraction. For example, if the trigger was sadness, food may be temporarily soothing and distracting from the source of sadness. Likewise, if the trigger was a big tray of brownies, eating several of them would be pleasurable. The distraction or pleasure is initially satisfying and therefore drives the Over Eating Cycle.



When? The desire to eat is often triggered by various environmental and emotional triggers. External cues, such as the time of day, appetizing food, or certain activities associated with food may trigger your urges to eat. The trigger may also be emotions such as loneliness, boredom, anger, or stress. Sometimes hunger triggers the initial urge to eat, but then environmental and emotional cues trigger overeating.

What? The types of food you choose to eat in response to triggers other than hunger are more likely to be tempting foods or comfort foods. For example if the trigger was a ballgame, the choice may be a hot dog and chips; if the trigger was stress, the choice might be chocolate or cookies. It is less likely that you will choose nutritious foods in the Over Eating Cycle since you are not eating in response to your body's physical needs.

How? In the Over Eating Cycle, you are more likely to eat automatically and/or unconsciously. You may eat, or continue to eat, whether you are hungry or not. For example, you may grab a handful of candy or nuts from a bowl as you pass by. You may eat while you are distracted watching T.V., driving, or talking on the phone. You may eat secretly or quickly to finish before

someone catches you. Additionally, if you feel guilty about eating, you can't fully enjoy the food you choose. Eating in this way cannot be physically or emotionally satisfying.

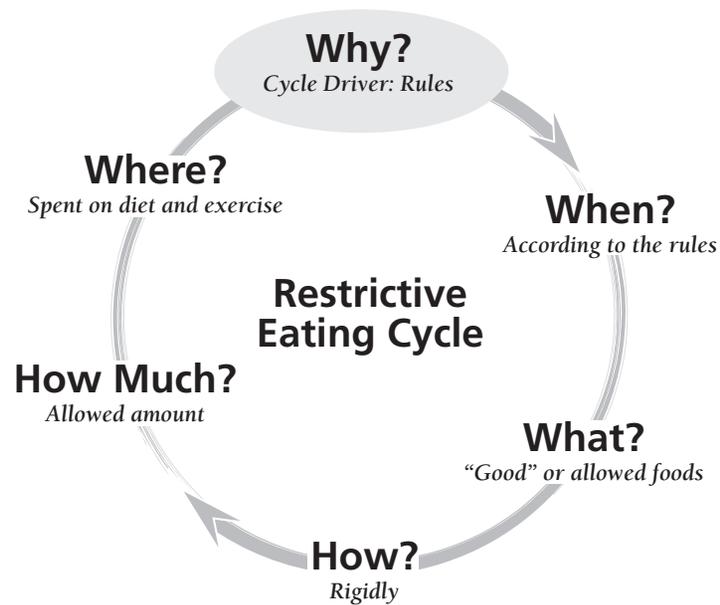
How Much? You might eat until the food is gone or you feel uncomfortable. When you are in an Over Eating Cycle, the amount of food you eat is often determined by external factors like how much food is served or how much is in the package. If your body didn't give you the start-eating signal (hunger), the only stop-eating signal is discomfort, running out of food, or being interrupted. All too often, you will feel full, uncomfortable, or even numb after eating, instead of feeling content and satisfied.

Where? Any excess fuel is stored. The fuel you consumed goes toward living your life; however, if you eat when your body didn't signal its need for fuel with hunger, your body has no choice but to store the extra fuel for later in the form of body fat. When you eat in response to external and emotional triggers the distraction is temporary and the pleasure is soon replaced by discomfort since you didn't really need the food in the first place. Eating this way and therefore carrying extra body fat can trigger negative emotions that may lead to more overeating. When your true needs have not been met, the Over Eating Cycle will continue.

The Restrictive Eating Cycle

Why? In Restrictive Eating, the cycle is driven by rules that determine when, what, and how much to eat. The rules may come from an "expert" or may be self-imposed by the dieter. When you are in a Restrictive Eating Cycle, the number on the scale or how well you have been following the rules may determine how you feel about yourself on a particular day.

When? The rules determine whether or not you are allowed to eat, for example, "Eat six small meals a day" or "Don't eat after 6 p.m." Often the rules were created for a reasonable purpose. In the examples above, eating frequent meals may prevent you from getting hungry, so theoretically, your eating will be easier to control. Prohibiting eating in the evening prevents eating due to



environmental triggers like watching television. However, these rules place artificial constraints on your eating that don't necessarily honor your body's natural hunger rhythms—and of course they don't address the reasons you want to eat in the first place.

What? You must eat “good” foods that are allowed on the diet. You may need to resist your favorite foods or even avoid certain situations if there are too many forbidden foods that you would be tempted to eat. In the Restrictive Eating Cycle, choosing the right food is very important because when the choice is good, you are good. But when the choice is bad, you are bad.

How? Following the rules may require you to be very structured or even rigid in your eating. However, always having to choose good foods may cause you to feel deprived, while choosing bad foods may cause you to feel guilty.

How Much? You eat the allowed amount since the quantity of food is predetermined by the rules. This may require weighing, measuring, counting, or in some way using an external means to determine how much food you can have or

how much food must be eaten. The purpose of these rules is to prevent you from choosing too much food, or perhaps not eating enough, on the assumption that you do not have the ability to consume an appropriate amount of food without following a set of rules.

Where? The Restrictive Eating Cycle usually requires a great deal of mental and emotional energy. Just as in the Instinctive Eating Cycle, your body will use whatever fuel it needs for work, play, exercise, and rest. However, if you are significantly under-eating, your body may attempt to conserve as much fuel as possible by decreasing your metabolism. Furthermore, while exercise is very important for overall health and fitness, in Restrictive Eating, exercise is sometimes used to earn the “right” to eat or to punish yourself for overeating or for eating a “bad” food. While it may appear to others that you are just trying to be healthier, many of your thoughts and behaviors may revolve around food and exercise.

Hunger is Your Primitive Instinct

The key distinction between these three eating styles is that in Over Eating, you are “out of control”; in Restrictive Eating, you are “in control”; but in Instinctive Eating, you are “in charge.” Since hunger and your need for fuel drives the Instinctive Eating Cycle, you are in charge of how you will best nourish your body and soul. To understand why this is so important, let's take a closer look at hunger.

Hunger and the instinctual drive to satisfy hunger are essential for survival. Hunger is a primitive yet reliable way of signaling your body's need for food, and therefore, regulating your nutritional intake. The sensations of hunger and satiety are the simplest, yet most powerful tools available to you for reconnecting with your instinctive ability to know what your body needs.

You were born with the ability to know the answer without even asking the question, “Am I hungry?” If you have cared for or observed infants and young children, you know that it is difficult to make them eat when they are not hungry—and it is

almost impossible to deal with them when they need to eat. Instinctively, babies cry to let their caregivers know when they are hungry. Toddlers in perpetual motion manage to eat only small amounts of food but eat frequently enough to meet their needs. Young children have the innate ability to regulate their eating according to what their bodies require. During periods of rapid growth or activity, children may be hungry all the time; when their calorie requirements decrease, they lose interest in food.

How You Learned to Ignore Hunger

Unfortunately, internal and external influences may cause this natural system of regulating food intake to go awry. For example, if a caregiver feeds a baby to calm every cry, the baby will learn that eating can soothe any discomfort. Once a child is old enough to sit at the table, a well-intentioned parent, wanting the child to eat a well-balanced diet, will serve the amount of food he or she thinks the child needs. The parent will then try to force the child to eat everything that has been served by saying, "clean your plate." This teaches the child to ignore the physical discomfort of being too full in order to comply with the parent's expectations and win parental approval. Sometimes the parent's pressure to eat certain types and amounts of food backfires and the dinner table can become a battleground of intense power struggles.

The child that doesn't get dessert unless he or she finishes all their dinner learns that sweets are an incentive to eat more than their body was hungry for. "Eat all of your dinner if you want dessert" translates to "You must overeat so I will reward you by letting you overeat some more." Children have a natural desire for sweet and higher fat foods but using sweets to reward good behavior or bribe them into finishing their whole meal can cause children to believe that these foods are special and make them want to eat them even more.

Although meeting the basic nutritional needs of children is critical, it is important to provide meals and snacks in a way that

respects the child's hunger and fullness cues. If not, the stage is set for food and weight problems in the future.

Children and adults may also learn to eat in response to environmental and emotional triggers. If you are eating when you are not hungry, you must be eating for other reasons. The triggers are different for each person and at various times, but if you struggle with your weight, it is likely that you are sometimes eating food for reasons other than satisfying hunger.

For example, have you ever suddenly become hungry when you walked by the doughnuts in the break room at work? It is common for people to confuse this sudden urge to eat with true hunger, but environmental situations like this often trigger this reaction whether your body needs food or not. Other environmental triggers include mealtimes, holidays, advertisements, entertainment activities, social situations, people, places, and even just stepping on a scale or thinking about starting another diet. There are hundreds of specific examples, but the availability of calorically dense, appealing foods in increasingly larger portions is a problem for individuals and society.

Further, many people learn to use food to cope with emotions. For example, if you have had a stressful day, you may comfort or reward yourself by eating a large bowl of ice cream. All people have emotional connections with food, including celebrating special events, expressing love, or finding comfort in Grandma's apple pie. However, emotional eating becomes destructive when it is the primary way that a person copes with feelings such as loneliness, boredom, anger, stress, or depression. To be clear, this does not imply that you are psychologically disturbed if you have food or weight struggles. It simply means you may have learned to cope with certain emotions by eating and therefore, at times you use food for purposes other than energy and nourishment.

When people become frustrated with their weight, they often turn to diets to solve their problems. Most diets have very specific rules about food choices and exercise but ironically, you may have to ignore hunger cues in order to follow the rules. As

a result, dieting moves you even further from your ability to know what your body really needs.

Most diets focus on what people should or should not be eating and overlook the fact that many people eat in response to triggers other than hunger. Since food is often not being consumed to satisfy the need for fuel, focusing on the form of the fuel is not very effective in the long run—but that is what most diets do.

Can people who are out of touch with their hunger signals begin to recognize and use hunger again to learn to eat instinctively? Definitely! Hunger is a natural, innate tool. The skills for using that tool effectively can be relearned in order to reach and maintain a healthier weight without dieting. Instead of following strict rules created by “experts,” you can become the expert on meeting your needs. This book will teach you how to use the fundamental information delivered by your hunger cues to determine when, what, and how much you need to eat.

Which Cycle Are You In?

As you read this, you probably recognized that you follow different eating cycles at different times. Even people who usually eat instinctively may eat in response to environmental triggers like a birthday party or an emotional trigger like stress. People who predominately overeat or eat restrictively also eat to satisfy hunger at times. However, though they may eat instinctively at times, if they predominantly eat in response to triggers or often restrict their eating, they may find it difficult to reach and maintain their natural weight.

People who struggle with food and their weight are usually not aware that they are caught in an Over Eating or Restrictive Eating Cycle. They often feel stuck and powerless to change—without understanding why.

When you have been eating too much you may not recognize that you are caught in a vicious Over Eating Cycle that literally feeds on itself. As you eat in response to your triggers, the temporary distraction or pleasure you get can act

like an engine that drives the cycle. You may decide that dieting is the only way to stop overeating and gain control over your eating habits and your weight. However, dieting simply switches you into a Restrictive Eating Cycle.

While in a Restrictive Eating Cycle, you may continue to eat in response to your triggers, but now you choose foods that are allowed on the diet. For example, you may eat to decrease stress but choose veggies to munch on instead of chips. As a result, your trigger hasn't changed and you still aren't effectively coping with the stress. Additionally, you may continue to overeat the allowed foods, expending a great deal of energy figuring out how to get the most food while staying within the confines of the diet.

Over time, you may begin to feel deprived or worn out by all of the time and energy it takes to follow the rules in a Restrictive Eating Cycle. So you cheat, feel guilty, and give up, shifting back into an Over Eating Cycle, once again consuming your favorite foods in response to the triggers that were never effectively dealt with. It is common for people to shift repeatedly from one cycle to the other. This cycle switching is also known as yo-yo dieting.

On the other hand, the Instinctive Eating Cycle is a more natural pattern of eating that meets your natural need for energy and nutrients. When you are in an Instinctive Eating Cycle you simply don't think about food or eating very much unless you are hungry. You don't obsess over food because you don't need to. Instead, you trust your body to let you know if and when you need food, and how much you should eat. If you are exposed to food when you are not hungry you may take a passing interest in it but you won't choose to eat a significant amount of it because you know you would feel uncomfortable afterward. You can eat anything you want when you are hungry, so you don't have to spend a lot of time deciding in advance what you are going to eat. You can truly enjoy food and eating because you won't feel physically or emotionally uncomfortable after you eat. You can consciously choose to follow a healthier diet, but you don't expect yourself to be perfect.

Relearning to Eat Instinctively

To resolve your weight and food issues without endless dieting you must restore your Instinctive Eating Cycle. Instead of focusing on what and how much food you should eat, the key is first understanding why you want to eat in the first place. This awareness will give you the opportunity to meet your true needs appropriately.

The first step, simple yet powerful, is to begin asking yourself “Am I hungry?” whenever you want to eat. This will help you recognize when the urge to eat is due to hunger and when it is due to some other trigger.

Furthermore, once you recognize which cycle you are in at any given moment, you can choose to re-enter the Instinctive Eating Cycle by asking yourself important questions at each Decision Point along the Eating Cycle. You will learn how to use each of these Decision Points to build the essential layers of lifetime weight management skills throughout the following chapters.

Reach and Maintain a Healthier Weight by Asking, “Am I Hungry?”

Imagine what it will be like when you re-establish physical hunger as your primary cue for eating and learn to satisfy your other needs in positive and constructive ways. In essence you will create new pathways, for eating and for living.

You won't be required to count calories, exchanges, fat grams, or points. You won't be told to eliminate your favorite “fattening” foods. You won't need to tolerate tasteless food substitutes. You won't have to avoid certain restaurants or “cheat” on your birthday. And you won't need an endless supply of willpower and self-control.

There won't be any more good or bad foods to worry about. You will discover that it is possible to balance eating for nourishment with eating for enjoyment. Eating will become pleasurable again, free from guilt and feelings of deprivation.

This time, you will learn to listen to your body's messages about when to eat, what kinds of food satisfy you, and how much food you need—without following a restrictive diet. You will gain the tools to manage your weight no matter where you are or what you are doing—celebrating the holidays, doing business over lunch, or relaxing on vacation.

Food will begin to serve its proper function in your life—to satisfy hunger. Once you learn to recognize and respond appropriately to hunger, you will begin to see what other needs eating has been fulfilling and perhaps what role your weight is playing in your life as well.

Once you are empowered to manage your eating by listening to your own instincts, you will feel empowered to take charge of other areas in your life as well. You will feel more self-motivated to make healthy nutrition and fitness choices when they come from within rather than from an external set of rules.

As you break away from the Over Eating and Restrictive Eating Cycles, the Fitness and Nutrition sections of each chapter will show you how activity improves your health, energy, and well-being, and how food and eating fuels your body, your mind, and your spirit.

Ultimately, you will develop constructive skills and effective coping mechanisms to meet your other needs. Step by step, you will learn a whole new system for losing weight and building optimal health. You will free yourself from your focus on food and weight and discover new tools and energy to lead a more fulfilling, balanced life.

Fitness: Boosting Your Metabolism

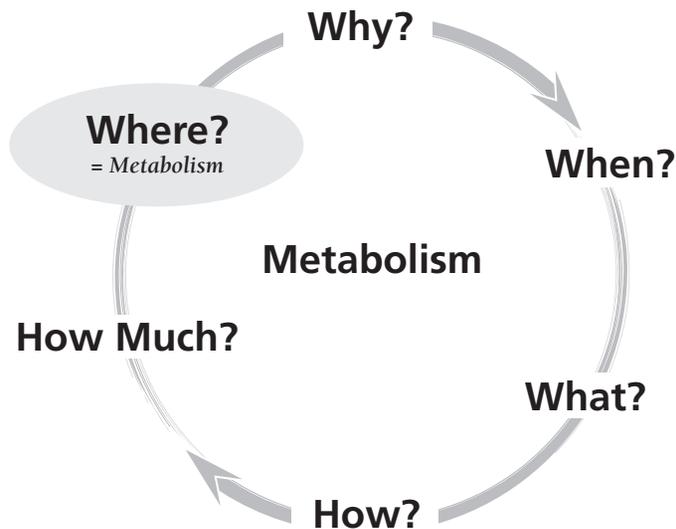
It is an undeniable fact: to lose weight, you must use more fuel than you consume. All weight-loss plans are just variations on how to accomplish this—including this one. The difference is that *Am I Hungry?* guides you toward meeting your true needs, including your body's needs. Over Eating and Restrictive Eating often do not meet your body's needs. Worse yet, they

often have negative effects on your metabolism. Therefore, understanding what metabolism means and how it works is essential if you are going to break out of those cycles and make your metabolism work for you.

By understanding how your body functions and uses the food you eat, you can choose to help your body become more metabolically active. The best way to optimally support and increase your metabolism is to live an active lifestyle and exercise regularly, maintain and build your muscle, and eat an appropriate amount of food to fuel your cells.

Understanding Your Metabolism

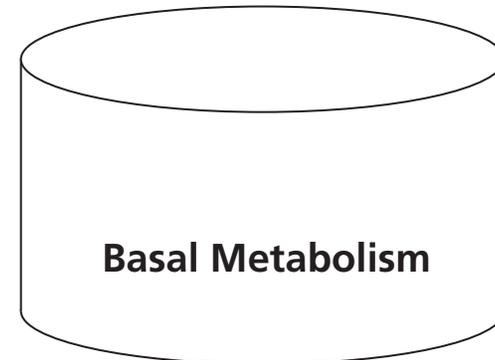
The word metabolism is thrown around a lot these days. People often complain about having a slow or sluggish metabolism. Many products promise to “boost” your metabolism. But what is metabolism anyway? In a nutshell, metabolism simply refers to the amount of fuel or energy, measured in calories, that your body burns each day. When most people think of burning calories, images of treadmills and aerobics classes come to mind. However, you are burning calories right now just reading this book. In fact, how you live



your life determines your metabolism—it is “Where” your energy goes.

Your Basal Metabolism

Think of your metabolism as the amount of fuel your body burns, represented here as a fuel can. The largest part, called basal metabolism, is the number of calories your body burns to support your basic bodily functions. These vital functions include your heartbeat, breathing, brain function, and numerous other important, but invisible, activities going on inside of you at all times. Even eating, digesting, and processing food contribute to your metabolism.



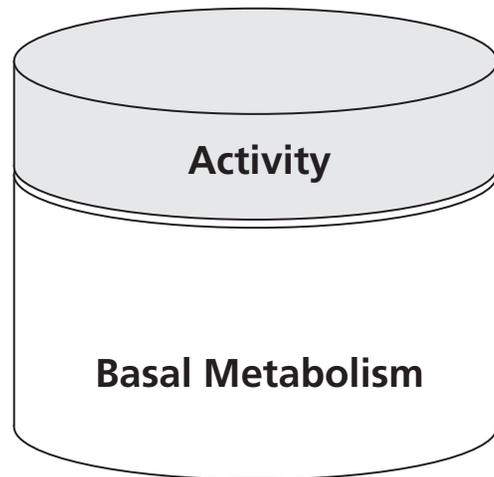
In fact, every little cell in your body is like a tiny engine that burns fuel continuously in the process of doing its job. These tiny engines never shut off—at least while you are living. Even when you're sleeping or sitting still, your body's cells are still actively working just to keep you alive. It's just like your car; when the engine is running, it is burning fuel—even if it is just sitting in the driveway.

Activity Boosts Your Metabolism

Your activity level is another significant part of your fuel needs. On top of your basal metabolism, your body's workload increases with any type of activity, from brushing your teeth and

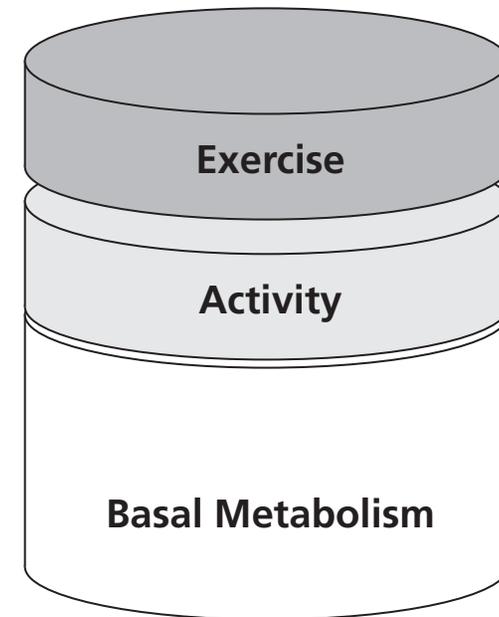
taking a shower, to walking around your home or office. This extra work boosts the number of calories the cells burn, because the labor of the cells has increased. For instance, your lung cells must work to take in oxygen and release carbon dioxide, but they work harder when you're walking at a brisk pace than when you're sitting in a chair. The more you demand from your body, the more calories each tiny cell burns while doing its job.

Anything you do above your basal metabolic level constitutes activity. This includes lifestyle activities—all of the things that you do throughout your day-to-day existence. In fact, many of the people who seem to have a high metabolism are actually just more active throughout their day. A few added steps here and there, and a little extra effort during everyday work and play really add up.



In addition to an active lifestyle, regular exercise is another great way to boost your physical activity level and therefore, your metabolism. Obviously, a person who walks two miles a day will burn more calories and will be more fit than someone who does not exercise at all. Exercise is a very effective metabolism booster. Not only does it burn more calories while you are doing it, it even raises the amount of fuel your cells burn for awhile afterward. The point is that any additional

lifestyle activity or exercise above your basal rate will raise your metabolism.



Muscle Burns Calories

Another piece to this metabolic puzzle is your body composition. Your body is composed of water, adipose tissue (better known as fat), and lean tissue, which is everything else (muscle, bone, hair, and other tissues). Muscle mass is part of your lean tissue and is a significant contributor to an active metabolism. A majority of your body's machinery is composed of muscle, including many of your internal organs. Muscles help you breathe, digest food, move your body, lift and carry objects, and even stand upright. The tiny engines of muscle cells burn more energy than less active cells. Therefore, muscle is metabolically active tissue because it requires a significant amount of energy to perform its work. Muscle cells burn more calories than fat cells because the workload, or demand, on muscles is so much greater.

Not only do muscle cells require more energy to do their work, but it also takes energy to maintain them. A pound of muscle burns more calories each day than a pound of fat. Muscles are maintained simply by using them regularly. However, whenever you do more than your body is accustomed to, your body will build more muscle to accommodate the new workload. Building this new muscle tissue requires even more fuel. Of course, once you build additional muscle tissue, it takes more energy to maintain it. In short, the more you increase the number of active cells that you have, the more calories you will burn. It's like a factory; as the number of workers increases, the productivity, or output, goes up. By maintaining the muscle you have and building new muscle tissue, you will burn more calories per day, boost your metabolic rate, and turn your body into an energy-burning machine.

Understanding your metabolism isn't difficult. More importantly, improving your metabolism isn't all that difficult either. You will learn how to boost your metabolism, improve your energy, reconnect with your body, and enhance your sense of well-being by increasing your exercise and lifestyle activity levels.

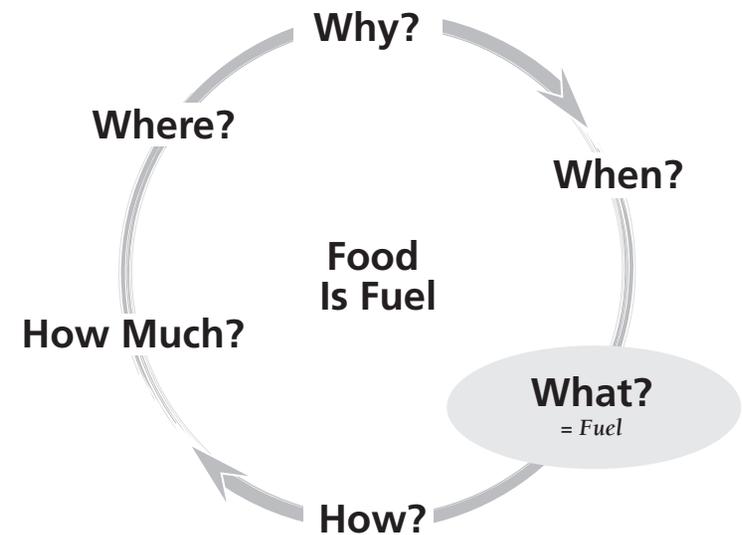
Nutrition: Fueling Your Metabolism

To help you begin to make the best possible choices to satisfy your body and your soul, the nutrition sections in each chapter will focus on building your understanding of fundamental nutrition principles and facts. This foundation of practical nutrition information will help you make meaningful long-term changes.

Let's start by understanding how food fuels your metabolism.

Food is Fuel

There is another important part of metabolism—food. Your fuel intake plays a vital role in keeping this process running smoothly. When you eat for reasons other than hunger, you will



take in more food than your body requires and create a surplus of fuel. This excess fuel is stored as body fat until it is needed later.

On the other hand, cells must have an energy supply in order to perform their required tasks. Without an adequate amount of fuel, your cells cannot function properly, resulting in some unfavorable consequences. Think about your car again. If it runs out of gasoline, it will putter and stop. However, because you must stay alive, your body's cells cannot all just shut off. When your cells are short on fuel from food, your body will turn to its reserve tanks to utilize other energy sources. Initially, it will use up carbohydrates that have been stored as glycogen in your muscles and liver. When that is gone, it will begin to break down certain tissues to use for its energy supply, specifically fat and muscle.

Conserving Energy

In a state of ongoing fuel shortage or semi-starvation, your body must pick and choose which cells to continue supporting and which ones to drop. A priority list is developed, and

needless to say, the cells that provide vital activities take top priority. Remember, muscle cells require a lot of energy, so those that aren't being used regularly will be given the pink slip. This loss of calorie-burning muscle is a real blow to your metabolism.

When your food supply remains low, your cells must also become more efficient. That is, they attempt to perform their jobs without burning as many calories; they adapt to the lower energy intake by expending less energy. If this happened in your car, you'd be thrilled, but when it happens in your body, you're in trouble. Your body could be burning 20 percent to 36 percent fewer calories per day by becoming more fuel-efficient. Furthermore, after a period of energy deprivation, your body becomes more efficient at storing body fat because it is less metabolically active and fat provides a ready source of extra fuel. The result is that it is easier for you to gain weight, harder for you to lose weight, and you feel sluggish and weak.

Essentially your body is required to manage the difference between the number of calories you feed it and the number of calories it burns. When you take in too much fuel, your body will save it for later. When you take in far fewer calories than your body needs, your metabolism will eventually decrease. Your body is remarkably effective at managing your metabolism to prevent death by starvation.

Your Body is Programmed to Survive

While it seems that diets often backfire, this is simply the result of your body adapting to being under-fueled. Your body has primitive, complex survival mechanisms that help keep you alive during limited periods of starvation. In days long ago when food was not as plentiful or easy to obtain, people worked quite strenuously hunting and gathering their food. Perhaps they chased wild game or walked miles to find edible berries and roots. When they were able to eat freely, their bodies used the fuel as needed for activities and stored any extra fuel as fat for later use. When food supplies were scarce during cold winters or summer droughts, their bodies could draw on the stored fat for fuel.

If a famine persisted, their bodies would sense the lack of sufficient fuel and conserve energy by eliminating non-essential functions and slowing down the essential ones. Fat stores and muscle tissue would be broken down for energy to meet their bodies' caloric demands. When the famine was over and they could eat whenever they were hungry, their bodies would rebuild lost fuel stores. Their muscle mass would also be rebuilt as their tasks of hunting and gathering of food were supported by adequate nourishment.

Your body still has this primitive survival mechanism, but in many areas of modern society food is abundant and readily available. Generally speaking, most modern famines are the result of self-imposed starvation diets. Under strict dieting conditions, the same old survival mechanisms still exist. Initially you will lose water and some of your stored fuel. However, when your survival mechanisms kick in, your metabolism decreases to conserve energy, and some of your muscle mass may be lost. As a result, you burn fewer calories each day and your weight loss slows down. This is the frustrating plateau dieters so often experience.

When the diet is over and you return to your previous eating habits, your body quickly replaces its fat stores. Unless you are actively exercising, you will not rebuild the majority of the muscle tissue you lost during the diet.¹ Ultimately, this causes you to have a lower metabolic rate and a higher body fat percentage than before the diet. This explains the irony that most people end up less healthy than before they tried to lose weight by going on a diet.

So What Does Work?

At this point you may be thinking, "If diets don't work, what am I supposed to do?" You have been bombarded with information about eating right and exercising so you probably

¹ An exception to this occurs when a person has lost essential muscle mass necessary for basic daily activities and bodily function as occurs in extended periods of starvation and anorexia nervosa. This essential muscle tissue will be rebuilt as soon as adequate nourishment is supplied.

know the fundamental principle of weight loss: the number of calories you eat must be less than the number of calories you burn. Yet, despite all of the information available on the countless ways to accomplish this, you and millions of others still battle with weight issues. Many people continue to try one diet after another, while others have simply given up.

It is time to face the fact that the key to solving your struggle with weight and food does not lie in a magical, or even logical, combination of diet and exercise. The real solution is in re-learning the use of innate and instinctive eating patterns and thereby eating in a way which fuels your metabolism. By finally addressing your relationship with food you can work toward optimal health rather than some arbitrary weight goal.

But first, you must give up on dieting. Forever! While that may be a relief, it may not be as easy as it sounds. Your diet thoughts and behaviors may have become so ingrained that you don't even recognize them for what they are. *Am I Hungry?* will help you let go of dieting and learn a way of achieving optimal health that is harmonious with the whole you.

Am I Hungry? will show you how your food choices can fuel your body, mind, and spirit. 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. You will learn to balance eating for nutrition with eating for enjoyment. You will develop the skills to enhance your enjoyment of food, your body, and your life.