

Roadmap to Wellness



Healthy eating isn't just about checking the boxes. (Did you eat your veggies? Protein? Whole grains?) A healthy relationship with food also encourages you to consider how you eat, why you eat and when you eat. Because it all matters. In the Roadmap to Wellness, we'll look at what healthy foods do for your mind and body. All so you can make more thoughtful and informed choices. [Let's dive in! >](#)



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Is there a “right” time to eat?

Three square meals a day is the gold standard for most people. But when you have time for those meals might not always follow an ideal schedule.

For breakfast, you settled for a quick bite in the car. That meeting took up your regular lunch hour. And an evening packed with activities and errands pushed back dinner to late o'clock.

It happens. Our schedules are hectic. Things come up, and you can't always plan your day around food.

The good news: You don't have to. Because there's no “best” or “worst” time for your meals.

FINDING A HEALTHY EATING SCHEDULE

The trick is to make sure what you eat and when you eat keeps you satisfied. You'll feel best if you fuel up with a variety of foods that contain plenty of healthy protein and fiber throughout your day.

An ideal plan would look something like this: Start with breakfast about an hour to an hour-and-a-half after you wake up. Followed by lunch four to six hours after. Dinner should come about four to six hours after that.

ADJUSTING FOR A LATER DINNER

In a perfect world, you'd want to give your belly some time to digest your dinner before you head to bed. So, when you can, it's best to aim to have your last meal of the day about three hours before bedtime.

NOT FEASIBLE TODAY? THAT'S OK.

If a late-night dinner is on the menu, make lunch your bigger meal of the day, and follow it up with a light dinner. Say, a green salad with grilled fish. Or vegetable bean stew with lean meat. Or a shrimp and veggie stir-fry. Stick to protein and vegetables. And keep it light in starch and fat.

And you can help move along digestion after dinner by keeping active. Take a short walk. Clean the kitchen. Vacuum. Some moderate movement can help keep dinner from sitting idle in your belly overnight.

CHOOSING HEALTHY SNACKS

Even the best-laid plans can have some hiccups, though.

So, what to do if that next meal can't come on time? Plan ahead with healthy snacks that'll fill you up with essential nutrients, not empty calories.

Snacking isn't a four-letter word. That is, if you're snacking out of actual hunger. Not because you're just bored or looking for a distraction. Choose whole foods for your snacks, like a handful of nuts or a piece of fruit. That can help keep your belly satisfied and your blood sugar regulated between meals, especially when dinner is running late.

BOTTOM LINE

The best time to eat is before hunger takes the wheel. Because an empty stomach is a recipe for less-than-healthy choices. Don't wait until your belly is leading the way to the nearest fast-food window. Aim for no more than six hours between meals — and keep healthy snacks on hand for when you need them.



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Learn How To Slow Down When You Eat

“Slow down!” is a phrase you’ve likely heard as a kid while you were eating. You may remember a parent or caregiver telling you that wolfing down your food would result in a stomachache.

And they were right. Research shows that eating too quickly can lead to a host of health issues such as poor digestion, heartburn, unwanted weight gain and poor nutrient absorption.

But you can rewire your eating habits to make them work for you and not against you. So, let’s learn more about fast eating — and how you can slow down for a better relationship with food.

DEFINING FAST EATING

You’ve probably had countless quick lunches during busy workdays where you don’t even leave your desk — or are shuffling the kiddos to their afterschool activities and eating quickly on the go.

Fast eating is generally defined as a habit of eating meals at a rapid pace, often without taking the time to thoroughly chew food or savor each bite.

Eating too fast can happen because of a busy life, emotional factors such as stress and anxiety, following strict diets or restrictive eating plans and having a lack of awareness about your hunger and fullness cues.

You may be eating too fast if:

- You finish a regular-sized meal in less than 20 to 30 minutes. It takes 20 to 30 minutes for your body to send a message to your brain that you’re full.
- You don’t chew your food thoroughly. If you’re not chewing your food enough to break it down, it can feel as though it’s not going down easily.
- You’re not pausing in between bites. Giving your stomach and brain time to take a beat in between bites is also important.
- You feel uncomfortably full. Oftentimes, when you eat too fast, it leads to you having a bloated feeling of fullness.



TIPS TO HELP YOU SLOW DOWN WHEN YOU EAT

1. **Give yourself enough time to eat.** First, make sure you’re setting aside enough time for each meal — ideally 30 minutes. Eating at a slower pace allows you to enjoy your meal and feel satisfied before you eat too much. Consider using a timer or watching the clock.
2. **Slow down your chewing.** Next, while you’re eating your meal, be sure to give yourself enough time to chew each bite before you swallow. This means you shouldn’t feel big chunks of food going down your throat. One way to do this? Chew each mouthful anywhere from 15 to 30 times, depending on the food. It can also be helpful to put your hand or fork down between each bite.
3. **Sip on water.** It’s also good to keep yourself hydrated while eating. Take sips of water every few mouthfuls — not only can this encourage some much-needed pauses, but it can also help you feel fuller. It can also help soften tougher foods during the chewing process.
4. **Practice mindful eating.** You can practice mindful eating by shifting your attitude about not just what you eat, but also how you eat. Yes, this means turning the TV off, letting your mind be still and breaking down your meals into smaller portions. Mindful eating also means engaging all of your senses — not just how food tastes, but also focusing on how it looks, smells and feels.

It can be easy to eat too quickly — but slowing down is possible. By shifting or rethinking your eating habits, you’ll develop healthy ways to make eating a pleasurable experience.



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Choosing Foods To Boost Your Mood

You are what you eat, the old saying goes. Maybe better said:
We eat what we feel and feel what we've eaten.

And it's so obvious sometimes, this interplay between eating and emotion — but so easily pushed aside.

But hey, we're feeling down (or happy! or angry, just fill in the blank), so we just eat (or drink) for comfort, right? Even though we know we'll regret it when the sugar crash hits, the bloat comes on or we don't sleep well.

In short, mood leads to food and food leads to mood ... and so on. It's a cycle worth breaking.

Or maybe just get a better cycle.

FOODS THAT MESS WITH YOUR MOOD

First, here are some foods to turn away from when you're in the mood to be sad, distracted or comforted. It's not a long list, but it's not pretty (and yes, it's stuff we reach for first):

- Sugar.
- Alcohol.
- Salty and starchy foods.
- Processed foods.

Of course, we can come up with loads of reasons for blindly grabbing chips, cookies, a beer or boxed mac 'n' cheese. Some studies have found, for example, that even the change in seasons leads to emotional eating (think the winter blues).

But studies show when we eat by emotion — especially during winter months — we end up with lower levels of vitamin D, which are then associated with more anxiety and depression. (So mood=food=mood, in a bad way).

Try to be aware of what the seasons — or any reasons — do to your mood. And more importantly, how you may answer that with food.

FOODS THAT CAN BOOST YOUR MOOD

Now, let's get to the good stuff — foods that can really boost your mood. Consider adding any or all of these to

your diet, maybe one a week. Then notice what it does for your mood, energy levels and sleep quality:

- **Foods high in vitamin D:** Beef liver and cod liver oil are the highest sources, though neither are found on your typical weekly grocery list. Lower on the list, fatty fish (salmon, sardines, tuna swordfish), egg yolks and fortified foods — milk, yogurt, orange juice and low-sugar cereals.
- **Foods high in vitamin C:** Try bell peppers, broccoli, citrus fruits, mangoes, spinach, kiwi and strawberries. These boost your immune system and can help with anxiety and depression.
- **Foods high in protein:** Again, we're talking lean beef, boneless and skinless chicken and turkey, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese and eggs. All foods linked to higher levels of dopamine and norepinephrine — brain chemicals that play an important role in our mood, our motivation and our concentration. Vegan or vegetarian? Opt for chickpeas, lentils or tofu.
- **Sweet potatoes:** A good source of vitamin A and fiber, which breaks down slowly and can help your blood sugar. This can keep cravings and emotional eating in check. Oh, and they're also rich in magnesium, shown to help lower anxiety levels.
- **Beets:** Bet on beets if you're feeling anxious or stressed. They'll also help lower your blood pressure.
- **Healthy fats:** Whether it's walnuts, extra virgin olive oil, nuts, seeds or avocado, research shows a significant reduction in appetite and cravings for starchy and sugary foods when you eat these healthy fats.



In the end, our emotions and our food choices are so closely linked that once you see the connection, you may never stop seeing it. That's a good thing. And a mood thing.



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Food and Your Feelings — How To Manage Emotional Eating

Did you have a rough day on the job? Is your favorite team losing the big game? Or maybe you just feel bored and restless. So, you reach for that bag of BBQ chips, stash of chocolate or those cookies you baked last night.

Your favorite munchies always seem to make things better. And you're not alone in thinking that way. You can't escape the idea that food fixes everything. It's everywhere — from ads to social media influencers' posts.

But did you know indulging in snacks when you're stressed or upset is considered emotional eating?

UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL EATING

Emotional eating isn't the same as eating because you're hungry. You do it because you're anxious, stressed or bored. Noshing on favorite foods can provide entertainment, fill up time and comfort you. And many people do it. Research shows our emotions trigger about 75% of our eating.

But why?

A lot comes down to science. When you're upset, your body produces cortisol. It's your "fight or flight" hormone. And it makes you crave salty, fatty and sugary foods. Eating these makes you feel better because your cortisol levels calm down.

When you're stressed or bored, your body and brain sometimes don't connect like they should. This can scramble your internal cues to eat. And when this happens, you may not notice a difference between real and emotional hunger pains.

But there's a catch to emotional eating. Sometimes, you never stop feeling satisfied, so you may eat well past when you're physically full.

ASK YOURSELF WHY

If you find yourself reaching for food to feel better, stop and think about why you're doing it. How are you feeling? What happened that day? Everyone has emotional eating

triggers. These could be:

- Restrictive diets
- Seasonal changes
- Disrupted routines.
- Holiday stress.
- Work stress.
- Conflict with friends and family.
- Illness or injury.



No one has the same triggers, and some may be unavoidable. But you can take steps to recognize what makes you feel snackish — and curb those cravings.

STRATEGIES FOR STOPPING EMOTIONAL EATING

- **Eat mindfully:** True hunger builds slowly. Hunger tied to emotional eating often comes out of nowhere. And you might only want certain foods. But you probably don't ever think about why. So, the next time you reach for your go-to comfort snack, ask yourself, "Am I really hungry? Or am I eating because I'm feeling something?"
- **Don't let yourself get hangry:** When you wait too long to eat, you can get too hungry. And even moody or angry, otherwise known as hangry. That can trigger cortisol production — and emotional eating. Eating before you reach that point can help. Filling up with healthy proteins instead of salt, sugar or fat can, too.
- **Plan ahead:** Swap high-calorie, greasy snacks for healthier options. Put nuts, fruit, veggies and popcorn ready in pre-portioned servings. It can help you stop that emotional eating urge in its tracks.
- **Seek professional help:** Your primary care provider or a therapist can help you work through stress and identify other triggers. They can also treat you for any underlying physical, mental or emotional conditions.

While there's no single roadmap to follow, even mindful, small changes can make a difference. They can put you on a path to success as you become more aware of what drives your emotional eating and take steps to stop it in its tracks.



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What Is Inflammation and Why Does It Matter?

When you cut your finger, it becomes red and inflamed. When you hurt your knee, it gets swollen and inflamed. But what does inflammation mean for your insides?

Just like inflammation happens after an injury, that same process can happen within your body. A little inflammation inside your body contributes to healing. But chronic inflammation can cause serious health problems.

Ongoing inflammation can trigger disease processes that damage your heart, brain and other organs. It also plays a role in nearly every major illness, including cancer, heart disease and depression.

WHAT CAUSES INFLAMMATION?

Processed foods are a common culprit of inflammation, but you may also be more prone to inflammation if you have a chronic condition or food sensitivity. Let's delve deeper.

1. Processed foods

Processed foods are one of the most common causes of hidden inflammation. This category encompasses:

- Candy, sweets and desserts.
- Prepackaged snack foods.
- Processed meats and cheeses.
- Sugary beverages.
- Fried foods.

In other words, if it comes in a box or a bag — or if it has a laundry list of ingredients that starts with sugar, salt or processed oil — it's almost certainly a processed food.

2. Chronic health conditions

If you're living with a chronic health condition, you may be living with chronic inflammation, too. Conditions associated with inflammation include:

- Crohn's disease.
- Heart disease.
- High blood pressure.



- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).
- Multiple sclerosis (MS).
- Obesity.
- Psoriasis.
- Rheumatoid arthritis (RA).
- Type 1 diabetes.
- Ulcerative colitis.

But everyone's inflammatory triggers are different. Certain foods trigger inflammation in people with some health conditions but not others. Gluten and dairy, for example, can further inflame bowel disorders, while nightshades (a category of vegetables including tomatoes, eggplant, potatoes and peppers) can inflame arthritis.

3. Food sensitivities

Even if you don't have a chronic condition, you can experience inflammation when you eat foods that you're sensitive to.

When you have an immune response to a food, your antibodies rise, which can cause inflammation. Basically, your body sees that food as a foreign body and starts working against it.



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What Is Inflammation and Why Does It Matter? *continued*

Foods that cause inflammation in one person might not cause it in others — the way, for example, that you can enjoy the occasional breakfast muffin without issue, while doing so causes severe inflammation in your friend who has a gluten sensitivity.

If you feel that a specific food (or category of foods) could be triggering inflammation, consider eliminating it for at least three weeks to see if your symptoms improve. After three weeks, add that food/category back in — but keep the amount small. Then, increase the portion size to determine how much you can tolerate.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF INFLAMMATION?

You might not realize you're experiencing hidden inflammation, but some physical signs can clue you into it — like puffy skin, a continual upset stomach and pants that feel tight around your waist.

Symptoms may include:

- Rashes.
- Red and/or puffy skin.
- Swelling in your hands and feet.
- Bloating and abdominal distention.
- Fatigue.
- Headaches.
- Achy joints and muscles.
- Gastrointestinal (GI) issues.
- A weakened immune system and more frequent illnesses, like colds and the flu.

HOW AN ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DIET CAN HELP

There's good news, though: Following an anti-inflammatory diet can help. Because everyone's triggers are different, there's no one-size-fits-all anti-inflammatory diet to follow. But, it's a style of eating that:

- Scales way back on processed foods.
- Focuses on whole foods.
- Reduces inflammation.

But just remember: An anti-inflammatory diet isn't a magic pill. Your results will vary based on how much inflammation you have and how severe your triggers are. Drastic changes never lead to long-term success. Give yourself three to six months — and see how you feel!



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