



Becoming an Intuitive Eater: How to Change Your Relationship with Food and Yourself

A webinar with nutrition therapist and meditation teacher Jenna Hollenstein, MS, RD, CDN

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Disclosure to Participants

Notice of Requirements For Successful Completion

Please refer to learning goals and objectives

Learners must attend the full activity and complete the evaluation in order to claim continuing education credit/hours

Conflict of Interest (COI) and Financial Relationship Disclosures

No conflicts to disclose



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Jenna is a nutrition therapist, meditation teacher, and author of five books. Her work combines intuitive eating, trauma-sensitive mindfulness, polyvagal theory, and other embodied modalities. Her work has been featured in *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Self*, *Health*, *Lion's Roar*, *Mindful*, *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Glamour*, *Women's World*, and *U.S. News & World Report*. Jenna lives in the greater New York City, NY, area.



Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this webinar, the learner will be able to:

1. State two ways that mindfulness supports intuitive eating
2. State three ways that the body may feel hunger
3. State one helpful approach to an intuitive eating practice in the presence of hunger distortions
4. State three internal cues of fullness
5. Describe the difference between fullness and satisfaction
6. Identify the three-step self-compassion formula and its use
7. State three non-destructive coping skills that can be used to tend directly to emotional needs



Part 1: What is Intuitive Eating?

Intuitive Eating

- A non-dieting approach
- Trusting your body to make food choices that feel good for you without judgement
- Reimagining your relationship with food and your body
- Learning to listen to your body, ask what it wants & needs, acknowledge its basic goodness
- Learning to work with discomfort and uncertainty
- Make peace with food
- Challenge the food police and diet culture



(National Eating Disorders Association)

Mindful Eating

Stems from Mindfulness:

- Focuses on paying attention to your moment-to-moment reality
- Notice & tend to bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, & the environment with curiosity, compassion, gentleness
- Expand to tolerate the full range of emotions & experiences
- Be authentically in your real life
- Connects you with your body, mind, & heart
- Mindful eating is using all of your physical & emotional senses to experience & enjoy your food choices



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(Fung TT et al., 2016)

Intuitive Eating & Mindfulness: The Connection

Both practices share the underlying view of:

- Working with things as they are
- Remaining present, flexible, gentle
- Respecting your innate intelligence and goodness
 - Innate intelligence: you are the only true expert of you

Both teach the importance of **tolerating discomfort**: to feel, allow, & stay with your experience even as it becomes uncomfortable

Both are paths, not destinations

Both are deeply connected with **interoception**



Interoception

- The ability to sense inward
- To accurately interpret what is presently happening in your body
- To respond with precision & kindness
- The ability to sense & accurately interpret what is happening in your body in real time



(J. Gibson, 2019)

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Benefits of Mindfulness Practices

- ↑ gray matter in the parts of the brain that control decision making
- ↓ matter in the parts controlling fight, flight, or freeze response
 - allows for discomfort to be felt purely & not automatically interpreted as dangerous
 - allows for more curiosity about your feelings
- Sharpens interoception
- ↓ stress hormone cortisol
- ↑ focus & concentration
- Depression, anxiety, OCD, substance use, & chronic pain are mediated



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(D. P. Lippelt et al., 2014; J. Wielgosz et al., 2019; Y. Ooishi et al., 2021)

Mindfulness and the Brain

Short-term effects:

- Shifts in circulating neurotransmitter & hormone levels
 - Enhanced attention & relaxation
 - ↓ heart rate, BP, respiration rate

Long-term effects:

- Structure & function of brain are altered
 - Expanded awareness
 - ↑ tolerance of discomfort
 - Think flexibly, see choices where you previously thought you had none
 - Powers intuitive eating practice

(B.K. Holzel et al., 2011; D. Krishnakumar et al., 2015)



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Poll Question

Which of the following feelings represents a dysregulated state of being?

- a) Creative
- b) Numb**
- c) Courageous
- d) Curious

Polyvagal Theory

Framework for understanding the nervous system

The Autonomic Hierarchy

- **Dorsal vagal complex:** shutdown mode when feeling threatened
 - Dissociated, isolated, overwhelmed, ashamed, helpless, hopeless, numb
- **Sympathetic nervous system:** fight or flee in the face of danger
- **Ventral vagal complex:** where you feel most yourself
 - Calm, curious, creative, confident, clear, courageous, compassionate, connected



(S.W. Porges, 2009)

Mindfulness and The Nervous System

- **Neuroception:** the nervous system's constant & unconscious scanning for signs of safety and danger
 - Perceived danger → dysregulated
- Becoming more conscious of yourself stabilizes the nervous system & helps it more accurately read the environment
- **Regulated**
 - Ventral state: feel safe and connected
- **Dysregulated**
 - Sympathetic state: angry or anxious in fight-or-flight mode
 - Dorsal state: shutdown and collapsed



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Mindful Moment: Choosing Your Thoughts

Meditation provides 2 forms of “training”:

- The ability to simultaneously feel & observe the self

AND

- The capacity to notice when you get lost & come back to the present moment



Part 2:

Intuitive Eating and Mindfulness of Body

10 Principles of Intuitive Eating

1. Reject the diet mentality
2. Honor your hunger
3. Make peace with food
4. Challenge the food police
5. Discover the satisfaction factor
6. Feel your fullness
7. Cope with your feelings with kindness
8. Respect your body
9. Movement: feel the difference
10. Honor your health: gentle nutrition



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Mindfulness of Body

- Forms the foundation of a lifelong Intuitive Eating practice
- Guided by sensations of your innately intelligent body
 - Hunger
 - Fullness
 - Satisfaction
 - The desire to move
 - The need for rest



How the Body Feels Hunger

- **Mouth:** preoccupation with mouth, desire for oral stimulation, urge to put food in mouth, mouth watering
- **Throat/esophagus:** achiness, dull pain, gnawing sensation
- **Stomach:** emptiness, hunger pangs, gurgling, gnawing, nausea, pain
- **Head:** difficulty concentrating, fogginess, sleepiness, light-headedness, headache, persistent thoughts of food
- **Emotional:** irritability, moodiness, flat affect, impatience, hungry + angry = hangry



Hunger Distortions

- Due to:
 - Sickness, stress, lack of sleep, time zone changes, history of restrictions, frequently skipping meals, medication, caffeine, nicotine, etc.
- Structured approaches to eating
 - Useful if you are not yet experiencing clear hunger signals, skip meals or snacks, or have schedule challenges



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Structured Eating

- Eating appx every 1 to 4 hours
- Combining protein, carbohydrates, & fat even if you're not particularly hungry
- Allows the experience of eating regularly & adequately
- Prevents hunger from veering toward the danger zone → binge eating
- Choose foods that appeal to you in the moment
- Structure supports & protects you, but your body's clear signals take precedence
- Transition to Intuitive Eating



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Internal Cues of Fullness

Fullness: occurs in different body parts

- **Mouth:** subtle change in the taste of food, less urge to put food in
- **Stomach:** stretch & distention
- **General body and mind:** relaxation response, physical release & relief

Mindfulness of fullness requires patient attunement to notice real-time changes in the body as you eat



Permissive Eating

- Total & unconditional permission to eat allows the emotional charge around fullness to dissipate & its distinction from deprivation to become clear
- Pay attention with gentleness
- Eating to comfortable fullness confirms the capacity for Intuitive Eating



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Fullness Vs Satisfaction

- **Fullness:** physical experience representing the changes in the body as you continue to eat
- **Satisfaction:** more holistic, an in-the-moment experience; derives from interoception of the sensory qualities of foods and how you feel in your body
 - Restraint theory
 - Habituation
 - Sensory-specific satiety



Restraint Theory

- Proposed in 1975 by researchers Hermann & Mack
- “Restrained eaters” were observed to eat more than intended, resulting in significant weight gain
- Deprivation leads to giving into perceived temptation → guilt, shame, & more overeating
- Antidote: give yourself unconditional permission to eat & to make peace with food
 - No superior or inferior foods



(Herman & Mack, 1975)

Habituation

- What happens when you do not arbitrarily limit yourself
- A diminishing physical or emotional response to a frequently consumed food
- Reconnecting with the innate wisdom of self-regulation
- Eventually, foods that were always desired become desired less often



Sensory-Specific Satiety

- Occurs within a single eating experience when paying mindful attention
- Awareness always precedes change
- Tune into subjective enjoyment at the beginning, toward the middle, & at the end of an eating experience
 - Taste
 - Temperature
 - Texture
 - Sustaining capacity



Coping Skills for Emotional Hunger

- Intentional & non-harmful distraction
 - Games, movies, TV shows, naps
- Mindful soothing
 - Music, aromatherapy, movement, restorative yoga, sensuality, breathing exercises, compression, body care
- Deepen personal exploration
 - Reading, listening/participating, journaling, workbooks, meditations, contemplations
- Ask for help
 - Relationships, therapy, medication, alternative therapies



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Poll Question

Which of the following is true of self-compassion as it relates to Intuitive Eating?

- a) It is aligned with self-indulgence
- b) It is contingent upon compliance with food and exercise rules
- c) **It is unconditional**
- d) It creates a sense of isolation

The Self-Compassion Formula

Used to naturally feel emotions directly

1. Acknowledge suffering
 - a. *I am really struggling right now.*
2. Normalize your experience
 - a. *I am not alone in my struggles with food and body, and I am now on a path to healing.*
3. Offer yourself kindness
 - a. *I will continue to stay mindful of what my body is telling me, and I will continue on my journey.*

Acknowledge that when you do things that seem harmful/dysfunctional, you are just trying to feel safe



Transforming Thoughts

Diet Mentality Thought	Self-compassionate Thought
I can only do Intuitive Eating after I lose a little weight.	I am choosing to do something counter to our culture, and that can feel lonely, but I will learn to be with myself at whatever weight my body determines is right.
I can't sustain this.	I don't need to have everything figured out. I can take care of my body and heart and come back to the basics of prioritizing sleep, not going longer than 4 hours without eating, eating a balance of protein and carb and fat, drinking enough water, and managing stress.

Case Study

- Client: lesbian woman in her 40s, living in a larger body with a significant hx of trauma, mental illness, T2DM, and BED
- Had spoken to numerous dietitians throughout her life, all of whom had guided her to lose weight (“to improve co-morbidities”)
- Scandalized by the thought that restriction was fueling her binges
- Shared that primary trigger for bingeing is a sense of emotional overwhelm
- Our work together focused on:
 - Biological approaches
 - Cognitive/emotional approaches
 - Somatic/emotional approaches

Questions?



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More On This Topic

Thank you for attending!

- Learn more with [*Intuitive Eating for Life: How Mindfulness Can Deepen and Sustain Your Intuitive Eating Practice \(12 CPEUs\)*](#), at [SkellySkills.com](#). Get 25% off with code IE25 through 3/11/23.
- Learn more with [*Core Concepts of Mindful Eating: The Professional Edition \(25 CPEUs\)*](#)
- Learn more with *Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Anti-Diet Approach*
- Live attendees: You'll get a link to the feedback survey in one hour/CE Cert tomorrow

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