

# 7

## Automatic Eating: How to Take Charge

*Eat until you are physically  
satisfied, not overly full*



YOU COUNT,  
CALORIES  
DON'T



Automatic eating refers to eating that occurs unconsciously. Suddenly, the cookie jar is empty and you didn't even realize it. Studies have shown that urges to overeat are like waves, they gradually build, peak, and then decline. When you have an urge to eat, note whether it is actually physical hunger because you have not eaten for a while or perhaps it is for one of the other reasons discussed previously (p149).

Often people feel the social pressure to eat when they go to visit at someone's house. They eat to be sociable or polite, rather than to satisfy their inner needs of hunger. Individuals who have low self-esteem need to find acceptance by pleasing others. *Ask yourself if you are eating simply because everyone else is eating or if you really want to eat because you are hungry.*

Studies have shown that the most satisfaction from eating comes from the first and last few bites and that the middle bites are automatic.

This means that you eat the middle bites because they are there, not because you are actually tasting and savoring the food. These calories are packed on the waist and the food is not really being tasted. Does this just translate into cutting back and taking a smaller portion? How is the HUGS™ method different from conventional diets that advocate smaller quantities and eating in moderation?

Bonnie walked into the Dairy Queen with a couple of friends who were on diets. She wanted a Blizzard so she ordered one. Her friends, on the other hand, may have yearned for a Blizzard and since they were on diets, they chose not to have one. Bonnie enjoyed the treat without guilt. She tasted and savored it and then a third of the way through she was satisfied and she left it unfinished. She knew she could have another Blizzard any time she wished so she had no need to binge.

Why did she leave part of it? Not because she felt pressured. Not because she had to eat in moderation and cut quantities. If you remember the Polivy and Herman example (p 147), dieters, once they start

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eating something, cannot stop until it is finished. Dieters say, "I blew my diet anyway, therefore I will eat the whole thing and diet tomorrow." Or dieters may eat the treat with guilt or in secrecy or too fast, and not feel totally satisfied, ending up binging on another Blizzard. Or they may eat several because of the feeling of being deprived. My client was exhibiting the nondiet mentality. She no longer felt satisfaction from the Blizzard so she left it. It is true that the most satisfaction comes from the first few bites because you look forward to the taste, and the last few bites because you won't have it again for a while. The middle bites give you no greater satisfaction. They are eaten by dieters because of the external cue of seeing the food. *Nondieters are selective and eat only what they really want.*



What did the dieters who just ordered coffee or diet drinks do when they got home? They binged on everything in site. They felt deprived and they wanted the Blizzard but it was an illegal food for the diet. When they got home they tried to find something that would satisfy their craving for a sweet. Usually these people eat more calories in the replacement food than if they had eaten the Blizzard. For them, calories don't count if no one else sees you eat it. This is diet thinking that contributes to you eating more, not less. *The extremes of dieters are denying themselves on the one hand and hanging on the fridge door later on.*

Constant caloric restriction followed by binging on foods plays havoc with your metabolic rate. Every time you starve and binge, your metabolic rate drops, which means that less calories will be burned at rest. For the same reason, it is essential to cut back gradually rather than suddenly on your total fat intake. Otherwise, you will be treating HUGS™ as a diet where changes are drastic and temporary. If you do this the effect will be to lower your metabolic rate as it responds to the sudden shock to



your system caused by being deprived of the usual number of calories.

Besides, you want permanent change, and your tastes can change only if you introduce new things gradually. This allows you to make healthy choices because of your new preferences, not because it is on your diet sheet. What a difference in thinking! Even if you have never dieted before, you may be partially in the diet mentality because of being influenced by society's preoccupation with food and weight. "I'll have it but I really shouldn't. I'll diet tomorrow." Slimmer people may not be necessarily healthy. Many starve and binge to maintain the desired figure or they are constantly on and off diets.

Change in thinking is crucial to long-term success. Eating in a healthy manner because you "have to" or are on a diet offers only a temporary solution because you are not in control. When you are not in control the changes won't be permanent. Making gradual changes allows you to acquire a taste for less fattening foods. In this way your preferences change, causing your choices to change. *Food choices are based on cultivated preferences rather than rigid self-control.*

Giving yourself permission to eat, using guidelines to help you retrieve more energy from foods will allow sweets to lose their appeal. When you realize that you don't have to give up sweets but can have them when you want, then eating only a bite or two to get the satisfaction from the food becomes easier. *You need to trust yourself to take charge, to make choices, to enjoy your life.*

***If you believe you are in charge you will be.***

Your nondiet thinking will allow you to have a chocolate bar if you really want it. By tasting and savoring the bar and eating it *without guilt*, you will probably be satisfied with less.

However, because of the high caffeine and sugar content of a chocolate bar, it may send your blood sugar for a roller coaster ride. Your blood sugar goes up quickly, causing your pancreas to oversecrete insulin, which causes your blood sugar to drop.

That's why you can't stop at one chocolate bar.

To help minimize this effect, when you have an urge for sweets and you have an empty stomach, ask yourself if you really want the chocolate bar or if your blood sugar is low because you are hungry. Have something to eat, then if you still want the chocolate bar, have it at that time. Remember that eating sweets and desserts after a meal prevents sugar highs and lows, because on a full stomach it takes longer for the sugar to hit your bloodstream. Continue this process of self-discovery.

**For many individuals eating sweets on an empty stomach sends their blood sugar on a roller coaster ride causing their blood sugar to rise quickly and then plummet to a lower level coinciding with a feeling of immediate energy followed by a feeling of being very tired.**

It is natural to want sweets when your blood sugar level is low and you are physically hungry. In order for you to remain in charge of the situation try this method of thinking and action.

- Eat regularly to prevent your blood sugar level from dipping too low.
- Eat a balance of carbohydrates and protein to allow a slower release of blood sugar into your bloodstream.
- If you have not eaten for 3 to 4 hours, have a more substantial snack such as bread, yogurt, bun, low-fat crackers, or fruit with low-fat cheese, glass of milk, etc.

Promise yourself that if you still want the cake or cookies, you can have them later on. In this way you are not denying yourself. You are better understanding your body signals and helping to distinguish between a craving and a physiological (physical) reason for the craving. You are dealing with the physiological reason first (i.e. low blood sugar). After that the psychological reason may seem less prominent.

## CONFRONTATION IS A LIFETIME SKILL

In a confrontation situation dieters would say that you shouldn't have a chocolate bar because it is illegal. It is not on your diet sheet. The fact that it is forbidden causes you to think about it more and want it more. When you confront this urge and don't give in, this act of denial is termed willpower.

If someone is successful in losing weight, the person is said to have more willpower. A better term is "won't power." You think that denying the chocolate bar and not responding to the external cue will make it easier to remain in control.

**Do you really want the sweet or do you think you want it simply because it is there and it is habit? *Confronting the urge to eat the sweet will give you the confidence to tune into your natural body signals. Believe in yourself. Listen to your body with regard to physical and psychological hunger. This will help you to distinguish between what you really want versus what you think you want due to habit.***

Confrontation is meeting the situation head on, and dealing with the cause of the problem. It is a positive skill. Learning to change damaging, self-defeating thoughts that lead to overeating by confronting them is a powerful tool.

What are your reasons for overeating? In order to be in charge, you must deal with the reasons for putting on extra weight. To end the constant struggle of dieting for the rest of your life, deal with the cause and find a permanent cure. Masking the cause only gives you temporary relief. Dealing with the cause however, may result in uncovering some information about yourself that may cause initial pain. HUGS™ will teach you the skills to deal with the problems and allow you to lead a fuller and happier life.

Let's go back to the scenario with the chocolate bar. Dieters see the chocolate on the table and ask: "Do I really need it?" or "Should I really have it?" The nondieter asks: "Am I really hungry?" or "Do I really want it?" Nondiet thinking empowers you to make the choice and puts you in charge.

Dieters are not using a technique; they are using

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*Take that  
“pause” to decide if  
you really want the  
cookie and are  
physically hungry.*

**Calories are  
wasted if you  
are not having  
what you  
want, when  
you want it.**

denial to deal with the situation. Nondieters tune into their hunger signals to check for actual hunger. If the blood sugar is low, nondieters may choose to have a snack first, knowing that the chocolate bar is available later on. Otherwise, eating chocolate on an empty stomach when your blood sugar is low, may lower it even further after the initial high. This could cause you to be unable to stop at one chocolate bar.

Eating the cookie dough because you believe that you cannot have the cookies or shouldn't have the cookies is also part of the denial process that occurs with dieting. With the HUGS™ philosophy, you know that you can have the cookies when they are baked so why eat the cookie dough. Rather, have a cookie after supper. The unexpected surprise may be that you feel satisfied with your supper and no longer desire the cookie since you know that you can have the cookie later on if you want it. In other words, you are not denying yourself, you are allowing yourself to have the cookie. The fact that you can *savor it without guilt* and enjoy it whenever you want, decreases your desire to want it.

Confrontation decreases the incidence of automatic eating, that is, eating simply because it is there. If you do have the cookie after supper, it will have less effect on your blood sugar because it will take longer for the effect of the sugar to reach your bloodstream. And you will probably eat much less.

Test yourself. When you haven't eaten for a few hours and your blood sugar level is low, walk into a restaurant. You see a nice assortment of cakes that you want. Recognizing why you want the cakes is important. First sit down and have a meal. Taste and savor the meal and you will feel satisfied. The desire for the cake decreases. The waiter comes up to show you assorted cakes on the dessert tray but do you really want the sweet?

Here's the time to use confrontation. Are you really hungry or just curious to know how it tastes? If you can't resist, try sharing the cake with a friend and practise the confrontation technique to combat automatic eating. Or perhaps recall the many times the

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dessert looked better than it actually tasted. If you order and can't eat it all, there's nothing wrong with taking the rest home or leaving it on your plate. After all, if it is no longer satisfying to you, then it will only go to your waist.

Dieters react differently. They see the dessert and want it. They may start to eat it simply because of the external cue of sight. Dieters may even choose to eat less food in order to have the dessert. This counting calories could lead to trouble. If dieters didn't eat foods with enough substance, the sweet will ultimately create low blood sugar and the craving for sweets will continue. The only gain is a few more pounds. A sense of failure is felt for losing control and cheating on the diet. On the other hand, if the dieter wants the sweet and denies herself physically, this can lead to a binge or preoccupation with the denied food.



SEE  
A  
CAKE      CRAVE  
A  
CAKE      EAT  
A  
CAKE

*Monkey see,  
monkey do.*



Confrontation does not mean total denial. It means that you will be satisfied with a small handful of chips rather than the whole bag. Confrontation means tuning into your needs at the moment.

Janet baked some great chocolate brownies for Saturday dinner dessert. She wondered what to do with the leftover brownies. How will the brownies fit this HUGS™ way of thinking? Taking them to work or giving them away is the “out of sight, out of mind” mentality of dieters. Why should she give them away? The rest of the family likes them. Once the new way of thinking is established, the brownies stay in the fridge. But since a small piece satisfies both Janet and her husband, the brownies may get stale. Instead of gobbling them all up, Janet now freezes her baking and takes out a small portion that satisfies everyone.

Confrontation can apply to any aspect of life, not just food. People often eat for other reasons that are not food related. Loneliness, anxiety, depression, anger,

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stress may be temporarily relieved by food. This is using food as a comforter to make everything seem all right. Accept that it is normal to feel depressed sometimes. If you allow yourself to experience these feelings you may discover why you are distressed and be able to work through the feelings so they won't seem so severe next time.

When you eat for reasons other than physical hunger, you are eating to satisfy your psychological hunger. Your physical hunger may be on "full" when your psychological hunger is on "empty." That means that you are not focusing on the food but using it as a crutch to help you deal with the situation. In this state you can eat a box of cookies without even realizing what you are doing since you are pre-occupied with the psychological problem. To help you get more psychological enjoyment from food, try tasting and savoring it when eating it.

*The end result of eating less on HUGS™ may be the same as if you were on a diet. However, the HUGS™ reason for eating less is very different. It's not because you have to. If you taste and savor your food, you are satisfied with less quantity.*

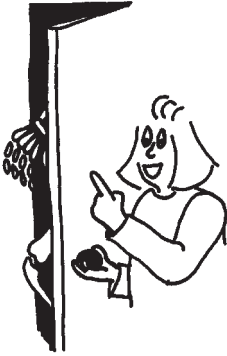
If you are not getting psychological enjoyment from the food by tasting and savoring the experience, then you require more food to satisfy you. This goes against the principles of HUGS™. The problem that caused you to eat in the first place is still there. Confront your problems and deal with them. This will satisfy your inner self and you won't have to eat as a substitute.

**If you hide your problems, you are not dealing with the inside so the outside will reflect on what's going on inside. You can change what you are by changing what goes on in your mind.**

Another point. If you eat because you are physically tired and are using the food for energy, perhaps you need to go to bed early. Otherwise, you are eating to stay awake rather than addressing your true need of sleep.

If you are lonely and eat to keep yourself company or

for entertainment, maybe you don't value your own company enough. You can be with someone and be lonely or you can be alone and not be lonely. It's all a matter of attitude. As you start to feel better about yourself, you will begin to find interests that keep you occupied and allow you to be constructive. You are worth the effort to make a nice meal for yourself and enjoy it. Falling into the tea-and-toast syndrome when you are alone becomes boring. Because you no longer enjoy or look forward to eating, you may actually end up eating more food, trying to get your psychological satisfaction.



*See the skeleton  
in the closet.*

Pamper yourself. You are worth it. Proper nutrition is the fuel for your body. Regular activity helps you to extract more energy to invigorate you in order to reach your potential. Notice your positive qualities. Don't always be down on yourself. Your negative attitude drains your energy. Focus on the positive, and on life-style changes. Find the reasons behind your eating, confront them, and deal with them.

Dieters eat when under stress. Nondieters do not. Switch your thinking to that of a nondieter, and you will be less likely to eat under stress. In fact, when dieting, stressful situations cause you to go off your diet. Why does this happen? It happens because dieting in itself puts a stress on your body as well as your mind. Using the principles of HUGS™, stressful situations can be handled with more confidence and authority. HUGS™ helps you get through the stressful situation with confidence.

Audrey, a person with diabetes, enrolled in our HUGS™ program. She related her present health problems to the dieting she had done in the past. She was undergoing very stressful situations at work which would normally cause her to eat and gain weight. HUGS™ has given her new focus, new thinking, and a positive attitude to stress. To her surprise, when she stepped on the scale, Audrey had lost weight. By not dieting, Audrey was no longer preoccupied with food. She learned to listen to her body and allow her hunger levels to control her food intake naturally.

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“I can’t be on a diet when I’m on holidays. My friend will expect me to eat her home baking.” Does this sound familiar? You’re not on a diet now but if your tastes are changing to healthier foods, why do you have to eat those high-fat/high-sugar foods that no longer satisfy you?

Eating to please others can be stressful. It puts the control in the hands of the host or hostess. When you are offered some food, you have a choice to take it or refuse it. If you really want the particular food item, then have it. If you don’t want it because you don’t particularly care for the food or you aren’t hungry, say something such as, “Thank you, I’m full right now, maybe later.” In this way you are leaving the door open to have the food later when you may actually want it or perhaps you may not want it at all.

Asking for a small piece as the cake is being cut can satisfy your curiosity as well as your host or hostess while allowing you to practise the principles of the most enjoyment coming from the first and last few bites of whatever you eat. You can always have more if you want it. This also takes a lot of pressure off the hostess who won’t feel she has to prepare so much food for her guest.

Do you feel you have to bake up a storm before company comes to make an impression? Remember true friends and family come to visit because they value your company. Food does not have to be the center of attraction.

When you visit friends or family, reassure them that you have come mainly to see them. They will realize that they do not have to go to as much trouble when you come over.

Discuss your change of eating style with your host or hostess. You may be surprised that they are eating differently and only bake when company comes. Some hostesses realize that people are eating less sweets and they pre-cut smaller pieces of cake, laying them on a platter for company to sample. Often alternative healthier snacks are being provided. After all, the health wave is catching on.

**Observe  
nondieters in  
social situations.  
Food is usually  
not the center of  
attention for  
them, only a  
pleasant accent.**

The coffee klatch crowd is replacing their coffee and cake with a healthful walk or enjoying a visit and pleasant conversation in a stimulating environment. This decreases the preparation necessary for a hostess when she invites someone over. You don't need to eat coffee and cake. The skill of confrontation allows you to refuse these in a tactful manner so that others' feelings are not hurt.

If your meal will be later than usual, it's a good idea to have a snack prior to going out. This will prevent you from feeling famished, which may result in quicker eating without tasting your food or eating too much.

Distraction is another useful skill that can be used in situations where you have an urge to eat brought on by psychological hunger. Jim was used to finishing his meal everyday with dessert. Is this urge for a sweet due to physical hunger or to habit? In his case, it was simply habit. Remembering that urges gradually peak and then disappear, he temporarily distracted himself and the urge went away.

If having a dessert is simply a habit, then distracting yourself for a few minutes after the meal will cause the urge to go away. If there is some other underlying reason for wanting dessert, then it needs to be confronted.

Try distracting yourself with an activity that you enjoy that uses your hands or physically or mentally takes you away from the food situation. This skill is useful in situations where you are trying to break a habit. This form of replacement is only effective on a temporary basis before using confrontation. It can help you to collect your thoughts but it doesn't get to the root cause of the problem.

Doing activities that you enjoy could include going for a walk, having a bubble bath, doing a puzzle, sewing, dancing, listening to classical music, or deep breathing. If the urge for a sweet was due to an external cue such as smelling muffins baked in a bakery, then walking on by may allow the urge to go away. The reason this will work is that you distracted

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yourself for the first few minutes when the urge was at its peak. By distracting yourself at this time, the urge will gradually diminish.

However, if there is a greater underlying cause than the external cues of sight or smell or habit, the urge will recur once the activity is finished. The activity is merely a “cop-out” from your desire for the food. It’s a temporary substitute rather than a skill. You will still have to confront these feelings to minimize the chances of them causing you to eat.

Suppose you had a fight with your spouse that makes you angry enough to want to devour tons of calories to help make you feel better. In this way, you are trying to mask your feelings instead of dealing with them directly. Screaming at your spouse won’t solve the problem either, no matter how angry you are. You may decide to go for a walk to allow yourself to calm down, think things over, and plan a strategy for when you come back. This temporary distraction could be helpful in allowing you to think and assess the situation. However, you will still have to confront the situation when you get back. If you don’t, in go the cookies.



Here’s a new way of viewing distraction. Ask yourself what’s happening in your life that is annoying or painful. Are you avoiding facing it or thinking about it by the distraction of eating?

When you are using distraction techniques, it is important to find an activity that you enjoy. Doesn’t it make sense that you can acquire a taste for enjoyable activities just as you can acquire a taste for less fattening food? My husband enjoys classical music. By going with the flow, I have learned to appreciate it and use it as a form of distraction to mentally take myself away from the situation or the day’s cares.

On the other hand, if you do not enjoy the activity, using it as distraction will not work to alleviate the problem at hand. For example, you might do ironing as a form of distraction even though you do not like ironing. This is using the diet mentality of substitut-

ing something inferior rather than finding excitement in a new hobby. You may feel deprived and still turn to food when you are finished. If you are not getting your psychological enjoyment from other activities, then you may turn to food to find that release. Look within and you may discover hidden talents that you would like to explore that can help you fulfill yourself more positively.

In order to confront your hunger and your inner feelings, it is important to understand what “hunger” feels like. For many who have been on so many diets, they are so out of tune with their bodies, that they are no longer able to know what it means to feel hungry. If you are still not in tune with your hunger signals, review Chapter 6. This is the key to helping you succeed.

*Remember that anything worth doing is worth doing until you learn to do it well! So practise, practise, practise.*

Diets show you how to ignore your hunger signals. If you are hungry and the diet sheet says not to eat, then you do not eat. You may drink something that temporarily makes you feel satisfied, only to be famished later on. Babies know when they are hungry. Adults ignore the signals because they are influenced by society’s obsession with weight. Children too are subjected to parental restraint. Parents don’t want their children to be large and this causes restrained eating. Statements such as “Don’t you think you’ve had enough?” can worry the child and cause secretive eating. A child’s or teenager’s food needs are much greater than those of an adult. There is the danger that growing bodies will get insufficient calories or nutrients for proper growth. Another danger is instilling the “diet mentality” into young people.

Dealing with the cause rather than restricting eating is a more positive approach. Reinforce this by putting a family focus on active living, and fill in leisure time with life-style activities rather than centering activity around food.

*Accept your body shape and that of your child's.*

*Unrealistic expectations are the very seedbed of depression. Breaking free of them unleashes the power to break free of the diet mentality.*

### **CLEANING YOUR PLATE—HABIT OR NEED**

Back in the days when you were growing up, finishing everything on your plate may have been from necessity. During the Depression, you never knew when or if you were going to get another meal. Eating everything just in case you would have to go hungry for a while was accepted.

This philosophy of wasting nothing may have been passed on to the children of the next generation. How often have you heard, “Eat everything. The children in Biafra are starving,” or “I’ll give you dessert if you finish your meal.” This condition placed on dessert may have caused you to overeat so that you could have the dessert.

This may have been the beginning of putting you out of tune with your internal body signals. You were responding to external cues, not internal ones. You were moving away from your internal instincts and depending on other people’s ideas and reactions. No doubt some parents still rely on this method of getting children to eat everything from their plates.

Today’s generation of weight watchers seems to be trying to impose food restrictions on the child out of fear that the child will become large like the parent. This instills feelings of deprivation in the child, which leads to bingeing. Many children today are out of tune with their bodies and rather than stuffing themselves may be undereating to comply with the parents’ wishes. This can result in inadequate growth, deficiencies, and insufficient calories, causing cravings and secretive eating. Eating disorders will certainly emerge.

In fact, there is an increase in eating disorders in North America. With teenagers, poor body image and society’s view of the “perfect body,” stemming from the “perfect child with designer clothes” may cause teenagers to inflict periods of starvation on themselves to attain this ideal body image. In pursuit of thinness, their health suffers. Perhaps adults are

being poor role models because they are never satisfied with their own bodies, and constantly going on and off a diet.

Understanding the reasons why a habit has become entrenched allows this newly found insight to help you find the solution. Use the skill of confrontation to help you break the long-lasting habit. The attitude of “that’s just the way I am” will not allow you to succeed in breaking the habit.

Automatically cleaning your plate after each meal is responding to an ingrained habit. You are not in charge, the chef or waitress is.

**Eating until you are satisfied, and not exceeding that point, may mean leaving something on your plate. If finishing everything from your plate is simply a habit, then you are not denying yourself if you leave something on your plate. After all, you didn’t really want it, you simply ate it because it was there.**

Stop partway through your meal to consciously decide if you want more. Putting a “pause” or “time out” into your meal may surprise you. You’ll find you will be full sooner. Remember, it takes roughly 20 minutes for your stomach to tell your brain that you are full.

Ann commented that she had been taught not to waste food. However, if your body does not want any more food, then the extra food is just going to your waist. Out goes the notch on your belt. You are probably not tasting your food at this point, simply eating because everyone else is eating, because it’s the thing to do, especially at social gatherings. Enjoy the event itself, its surroundings, the people, and the entertainment. These will take the main focus away from food. The food need not be the main reason why you attend the event.

At home, automatic eating occurs more easily when the food is served European style. You help yourself and the platters are left on the table. Second and third helpings may be eaten simply because the food is there and it tastes good, rather than because of physical hunger. Even when you’re aware of the

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situation, it's easy to sometimes get caught up in the social event of "dining" and to continue eating and talking.

Make an attempt to focus on eating while you are eating, and on conversation when you are talking or listening. Tune into your body and ask yourself if you really want any more or if your eyes were bigger than your stomach and you took too much. In that case, try not to eat for the sake of eating. Eat until you feel comfortably full. If you don't want it all, leave the rest for tomorrow, give it to your dog, or throw it out.

**Eat for energy, not exhaustion. If you overeat, you feel overly full and tired. Eat until you feel comfortably satisfied. That means not undoing the notch on your belt to make it looser.**



*Getting psychological satisfaction from food—taste, savor, and enjoy your food to the fullest.*

As you begin to get tuned into your body, you will be better able to judge how much you really want and there will be less waste. It takes time to reach this point.

The English style of the cook serving you from the stove takes the control away from you. You may be given too much and feel obliged to finish it so that you do not hurt anyone's feelings. Don't feel that you have to stuff yourself in order to prove that you like something. "It's really good but I'm full. Maybe I'll have some later," works well to notify the cook that your stomach is signaling you to stop eating. If you say "no" and mean it, people will respect your wishes.

The most preferred method of service is for people to get their own plate and help themselves. In this way, you are in control of the quantity and type of food that you want. You can be selective, having more of what you like, and less of what you do not like. Chris liked this approach because she would no longer get blamed for putting too much on her husband's plate. Hubby is in control of the total quantity of food that he wants to eat. The bonus is less hassle for the cook, and of course, fewer dishes.

Using this method, family members take respons-

ibility for themselves. Those who want seconds can choose to get up and get some more. Leaving the food in pots also keeps it hot longer. No need to hurry through the food when you know the second portion will still be hot.

For those of you who are still having trouble leaving something on your plate when you really don't want to eat it, try to consciously leave something small on your plate such as a small scoop of potatoes or a few peas, just to break that cycle of having to eat everything. Keep in mind that the purpose of this exercise is to empower you, put you back in the driver's seat where you are in charge of your body and its needs. Eating past the point of satisfaction just for the sake of cleaning your plate does not allow you to listen to your body. Being aware that you do not have to eat everything on your plate can help you to eat only until you are satisfied.

"So what is wrong with taking a little less and still cleaning my plate?" asked Betty. Nothing, provided you really know at this point what your body needs and you are completely tuned into those needs. The danger of doing this is that many people reflect on what quantity they feel they should be eating according to one of the diets that they have been on. Rather than taking what they want and what their body desires, they may choose what they believe their body should have according to previous experiences. As you learn to tune into your signals of hunger and fullness, you will begin to take the amount that will satisfy you. In this case, you may finish everything on your plate.



The other danger is that there will always be social occasions where you may not be in control. Without practising this skill of consciously being aware of when you have had enough to eat, it is the social events that may cause you to overeat. Learning to leave something on your plate may help you to be more conscious of your body's needs.

Practise the skill of leaving something on your plate so that you are prepared for the social event. For many, the ingrained habit of cleaning the plate is

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difficult to overcome, but it can be done. With time, you will be better able to assess what your body wants rather than eat with your eyes and overfill your plate. You will be in charge.

*Observe nondieters. Do they actually eat more food or does it seem that they are eating more because they load up on the carbohydrates (potatoes, rice, pasta, grains, vegetables, bread, etc.)?*

*Nondieters may also leave more on their plates.* For example, I eat what I like until I am satisfied, not until my plate is empty. If I have control of what I put on my plate by serving myself, then I take only what I like. However, I do experiment with different kinds of foods and give them a chance to be added to my food repertoire.

**Eat till  
you are  
satisfied,  
not overly  
full.**

You may feel at this time that you are in control and that the practice of consciously leaving something on your plate is no longer necessary. You may leave something on your plate only if you are no longer hungry. This is your goal. The conscious effort of leaving something on your plate is merely to break the habit of constantly finishing everything from your plate and ignoring your true inner hunger signals. Practising the skill will ensure that it becomes second nature more readily.