

# Understanding Appetite Cues In Eating Disorder Recovery

**It's About More Than Eating When You're Hungry &  
Stopping When You're Full**

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# Learning Objectives

- Define interoceptive awareness.
- List general disruptors to appetite cue awareness & disruptors specific to eating disorders.
- Explain how Intuitive Eating fits with eating disorder recovery.
- Outline several interventions to support clients with compromised appetite cue awareness.

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# Interoceptive Awareness

- “...the ability to be aware of internal sensations in the body, including heart rate, respiration, hunger, fullness, temperature, and pain, as well as emotion sensations.”<sup>1</sup>



# Appetite Cues

- Hunger

- How body communicates need for nourishment.

- Hunger pangs
    - Emptiness/hollowness in stomach
    - Increased thoughts about food
    - Difficulty focusing
    - Lightheadedness/shakiness
    - Low energy
    - Irritability

- Fullness

- How body communicates nourishment need has been met.

- Sense food in stomach
    - Stomach distention
    - Tightness or heaviness in stomach
    - Contentedness
    - Decreased food thoughts
    - Diminished reward value of food

# Disruptors

- General
  - History of dieting/weight control behaviors
  - Health conditions (medical or mental health; chronic or acute)
  - Medications
  - Caffeine
  - Trauma history
  - Stress
  - Chaotic schedule



# Disruptors

- With eating disorders
  - Gastrointestinal symptoms/disorders
  - Delayed gastric emptying/gastroparesis
    - Early satiety
  - Only able to sense appetite cue extremes
  - Distress associated with “normal” appetite cues



# Desire to “eat intuitively”

- Intuitive Eating is more than eating in response to hunger & fullness cues.
  - 10 principles to explore
- Starting with structure is often essential.
  - Broken arm analogy
- Intuitive Eating includes building awareness around what might interfere with presentation of hunger and fullness cues and learning how to meet our needs despite lack of reliable hunger and fullness cues, too.
  - Disruptions to regular appetite cues are normal

# Nutrition Interventions

- GI referral
- Structured eating
  - Different from controlled eating
  - Considerations:
    - Timing
    - Composition
    - Quantity
  - Primary goal is adequacy
  - Amount of structure needed may shift over



# Nutrition Interventions

- Distress tolerance skills
  - Refer to/collaborate with therapist
  - Distraction
  - Encouraging self-talk
  - Paced breathing exercises
  - Guided paired muscle relaxation
  - Sensory engagement
  - Support from others



# Nutrition Interventions

- Mindful Eating

- “Mindful eating helps us become aware of our thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations related to eating, reconnecting us with our innate inner wisdom about hunger and satiety.”<sup>1</sup>
- Checking in with body during and between eating experiences can be helpful.
- Checking in with body during and between eating experiences can be stressful.



# Nutrition Interventions

- Safeguards
  - Assess for barriers to regular, adequate nourishment & create a plan
  - For example:
    - Setting alarms
    - Scheduling eating occasions into calendar
    - Setting intentions
    - Meal planning
    - Creating default meals



# Thank You!

## Contact Information

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