

The Hunger Scale Explained

There are some fortunate people who are born with the genetic makeup that results in natural thinness. But not everyone who is “naturally” thin is born that way – there are some people who have, one way or another, developed habits that helps them maintain a healthy weight without putting a lot of effort into it. These are habits that anyone can learn and adopt. What are these habits? And how can you, too, adopt them?

There are four habits of "naturally" thin people:

1. Eat what you're hungry for
2. Eat when you're hungry
3. Don't eat when you're not hungry
4. Enjoy every bite

These habits work together to control what and how much you eat. Let's take them one at a time.

Eat what you're hungry for sounds too good to be true! What if I'm hungry for ice cream – all the time? If you continually eat any food exclusively you'll soon get tired of it and it will no longer be the obsession you thought it was. But let's look a little deeper. If we're honest with ourselves we'll realize that there is psychological hunger and then there's real hunger – and we can usually tell the difference. When we tap into what our body is telling us it is hungry for we can be confident that it's an indication that it has a need for that food.

Mary loved chocolate; in fact, she craved chocolate. After adopting this habit – “Eat what you're hungry for” - she ate nothing but chocolate for a week. At the end of the week she couldn't stand the sight of chocolate – what she now craved was something healthy: vegetables, fruits, nuts, grains. She fixed herself some corn, spinach, a salad, a fish steak, and she had fresh bananas and strawberries for dessert. Her body was shouting at her, “I want some nutrition!” And she listened.

Eat when you are hungry is probably the easiest of these habits to adopt. When you're hungry no one really has to tell you to get something to eat. In fact, some people have one continuous meal all day long. They no sooner eat a snack than they are back at the vending machine looking for the next thing. But again, there's real hunger and there's psychological hunger. When you have a difficult deciding which kind of hunger you're feeling, place your hand firmly on your tummy and press in for a few seconds. How hungry did you feel when your hand was pressed against your tummy? That's the real hunger – pay attention to it.

But sometimes a busy schedule or stress can get in the way of eating at the best time – when you're hungry, but not too hungry. Why is this a problem? Because two things often happen when we allow ourselves to become too hungry: we eat fast and we eat too much. That's where the last two habits come in.

Don't eat when you aren't hungry is the hardest of these four habits. How many times have you heard someone asked, “Are you full?” And how many times have you heard them answer, “I could eat more.” From the time we are small children we are taught that a proper meal means eating until our stomachs are full – instead of eating until we are satisfied. Essentially, most of us have been trained to over-eat. That training is why this is such a difficult habit to adopt.

It's important to change our goal in this regard. Instead of seeing how much we can eat before we become too uncomfortable, we need to see how little we can eat and still be satisfied. This is one of the key ways the Hunger Scale can help you conquer portion control.

Enjoy every bite means savoring the taste, texture, and aroma of our food. Take your time – get the most you can out of every bite. Why is this important? For one thing, it slows us down, which gives our brains time to get the signal that we are no longer hungry. When we eat fast we often over-eat because even though we've had more than enough to eat, we still feel hungry. There's a delay between when the

food is swallowed and when we feel the satisfied – enjoying every bite slows things down so that the signal comes through before we've over-eaten.

Another good reason to slow down is that it makes meal time a more pleasurable experience. Let's face it, if you're going to eat less then what you *do* eat should be a good experience. By focusing on enjoying each bite you make your meal something special. You can actually take time to taste your delicious food, instead of gulping it down so fast you hardly had a chance to really taste it.

Using the Hunger Scale

The Hunger Scale (go to Logs > Diet > *Hunger Scale) is a scale from 0 to 10 that measures how hungry or full you are. Zero indicates that you are so hungry you are physically shaking from hunger while 10 is for when you are so full that you are physically sick for the opposite reason. On the Hunger Scale, 3 is normal hunger and 5, right in the middle, indicates that you are neither hungry nor full – you are satisfied. Five is what you're aiming for. If you go above 5 you've over-eaten.

Using the Hunger Scale involves two steps. Before you eat you indicate, on the drop-down list, how hungry you are. The hungrier you are the lower the number. If you have "regular" hunger that says, "It's time to eat" then you indicate a 3. If it's more like, "Feed me NOW!" you may be a 2. When you get done eating (if you ate fast you better wait a few minutes) enter your after-eating Hunger Scale number. Hopefully, it will be a 5.

The Hunger Scale is a great tool that teaches you to think before you eat. Over a very short amount of time most people see a pattern develop. One common pattern is that the hungrier you are before you eat the more likely you are to over-eat. There are two reasons for this: first, we think of our stomachs as being emptier; therefore, we need more food to bring it back up to normal. Second, when we're really hungry we tend to eat a lot faster, and we don't get our satisfaction signal until we've already had too much.

Another thing that a lot of people notice is that they tend to over-eat with some foods or in certain restaurants or situations. The Hunger Scale can help you notice this because you actually document your over-eating when it happens. Pay attention to these factors and when you face them again you know that you need to plan ahead to stay in control of how much you eat.

By incorporating these four habits into your life you will find that you too are one of those "naturally" thin people.