

10 PRINCIPLES OF INTUITIVE EATING

This is a snapshot of how registered nutritionist Laura Thomas PhD teaches IE. Think of them as guidelines, and not as replacing one set of rules with another

1 DITCH THE DIETS

'How much time do you spend thinking about what to eat, when to eat or how much to eat?' asks Thomas. If you have any off-limit foods, cheat days, meal plans or rules about counting and tracking...

it's a diet. And when diets fail, they have side-effects – bingeing, slowed metabolism, loss of muscle mass, rebound weight gain, food obsession, disordered eating, shame, guilt and anxiety. Diets can also cause loss of your innate hunger and fullness cues, which brings us on to Principle 2...

Exercise: write a list of what has happened when you've dieted. Use two headlines: 'expectation' and 'reality'. An expectation might be: will be very good and follow diet to a T. Reality: felt deprived and overate 'bad' foods.

2

RECOGNISE YOUR HUNGER CUES

'People think getting hungry is a bad thing,' says Thomas. 'But it's your body sending you a message.' Imagine a fuel gauge, where zero is

empty and 10 is stuffed to bursting. Five is neutral, neither hungry nor full. If you wait until one or two to eat, you'll most likely end up rebound eating. Try to eat when you're a three. Thomas suggests three meals a day, plus two to four snacks.

Exercise: work out which of the sensations below signal hunger for you...

Mood: hangry, irritable, cranky, snappy?

Energy: sleepy, sluggish, listless?

Head: achy, light-headed, dizzy, distracted?

Stomach: rumbling, empty, achy, gnawing?

Body: quivering, low blood sugar, salivating?

3

BODY NEUTRALITY

If you don't feel able to love your body exactly as it is, a great way to begin is with body acceptance. 'It's unrealistic to think we can go from hating something to loving it overnight. Body neutrality means we can care for and respect our bodies, without necessarily being in love with them,' says Thomas.

Exercise: write down, in detail, what a day would be like if you couldn't care less about what you looked like, how much exercise you did or what you ate. Now reflect: what was it like not to be consumed with food or body image issues?

Plan to do some of your zero-fucks day activities.



'WE CAN RESPECT OUR BODIES WITHOUT BEING IN LOVE WITH THEM'

4 UNCONDITIONAL PERMISSION TO EAT

All foods are allowed – no more food guilt. Sounds scary? In fact, it reduces the likelihood that, after a stressful day, you'll eat all the biscuits. I'm not saying foods don't have different nutritional properties. What

I'm saying is, when you draw a boundary around a food, what you're saying to your brain is: "Eat me!"
Exercise: write a list of the foods you feel bad about eating. Can you stop thinking of them as good/bad, healthy/unhealthy, clean/dirty?

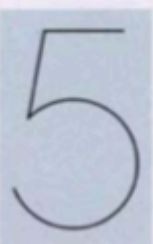


7 FEELING YOUR FULLNESS

'Often, people stop eating when they're around a five – no longer hungry but not yet full. Then, an hour or two later, they're hungry again. There's nothing wrong with the feeling of fullness. Your stomach's job is to be a reservoir for food. Try to eat until you're a seven.'

Exercise: take a mid-meal pause – a little breather for about 10-20 seconds. This is not a commitment to stop eating. Check: 'Am I still enjoying this food? Is this food satisfying or do I want something else to bridge the gap between full and satisfied?'

'EMOTIONAL EATING ISN'T ABOUT BEING BAD – IT CAN BE YOUR COPING SKILL'



5 NEUTRALISING YOUR INNER FOOD CRITIC

There's a nagging part of your brain saying, 'You can't have that' or 'That's not healthy'. It thinks in all-or-nothing terms: if you eat sugar, you'll get fat!

Exercise: each time your food critic judges a food, reframe it with three counter arguments. For example, if your food critic says, 'Don't eat the cookie,' you can reframe it with... 1) 'It'll satisfy my cravings, so I can stop thinking about food.' 2) 'A single food can't hurt my health,' and 3) 'If I'm eating a variety of foods, one cookie isn't worth stressing over.'



6 MINDFUL EATING AND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

If you've been restricting yourself for a long time, how can you know what you like? Did you eat raw cheesecake because it seemed 'clean'? Would you prefer real cheesecake? 'If we eat the food we really like, we're much more likely, when we reach

our point of fullness, to be able to say, 'I'm done', safe in the knowledge we'll be able to eat that food in the future.'
Exercise: have one mindful meal a day, where you eat slowly. If a whole meal feels too much, start with one mindful bite.



8 EATING YOUR EMOTIONS

Emotional eating isn't about being bad or out of control. It can be one of the coping skills in your emotional toolkit. And it's often simply because you're hungry. Have you eaten enough today?
Exercise: make a shortlist of other possible coping skills, maybe including giving a friend a call or going for a coffee. But if you need to turn to food, that's fine, too.



9 INTUITIVE MOVEMENT

'For a lot of people who come to me, diets and exercise have become interconnected. The evidence isn't strong that exercise leads to long-term weight loss, but there's a lot of evidence that it can improve our mental and physical health.'

And we know that being embodied – that feeling of being grounded in your body that comes from moving it – can help us feel better.'

Exercise: start to uncouple exercise from weight loss by thinking about how movement feels (see page 166 for more on this). How do you feel on the days you walk or move more? What happens to your back pain, your mood, your sleep, your flexibility?

10 GENTLE NUTRITION

'Gentle nutrition is thinking about how foods and different combinations of foods feel in your body.' In each meal and snack, try to have: a fruit/vegetable, a high-protein/fat food (for example, egg, fish, meat, pulses or nuts), plus a grain (such as bread, pasta or rice). Remember: you don't have to eat perfectly.
Exercise: before you eat, ask yourself: 'What do I want to eat? What's going to taste good? How's this going to make me feel? What's going to feel good?' After you eat, reflect on how the food made you feel.

Just Eat It: How Intuitive Eating Can Help You Get Your Shit Together Around Food by Laura Thomas (Bluebird) is out 10th January