



## To eat or not to eat: How do I know if I am hungry?

When was the last time you felt hungry? Do not be alarmed if that is a tough question to answer. As we age, it is easy to lose touch with our body cues for when we need to eat and when we have had enough. The holidays can be particularly tricky to navigate. The abundant presence of delicious food and special people are a powerful motivator to eat. Even if we are not hungry. Learning, or relearning, your body's cues for hunger and fullness can help you navigate the holidays, and every other day of the year, without feeling uncomfortably full.

### How can I tell if I am hungry?

Hunger is physical. When your body starts to run low on energy, messages travel to your brain that prompt you to start eating. Some feelings of hunger are more extreme than others. Extreme feelings include dizziness, weakness, feeling shaky, irritable, or grumpy, or having a headache. Earlier, sometimes-harder-to-notice feelings include a decrease in energy or an empty or growling stomach.

Feelings like stress, boredom, sadness, happiness, and cravings for specific foods are often misinterpreted as hunger. The time on the clock, presence of food, or seeing other people eat can trigger our desire to eat. Even if our body is not physically hungry. On the flip side, being busy or stressed may cause you to miss your body cues for hunger.

### How can I learn my body cues for hunger and fullness?

Hunger cues will be different for everyone. You will need to take time to tune in with how your body feels throughout the day, particularly around meal and snack times. Try using this 10-point scale to rate your hunger or fullness. To identify your patterns, for one week, jot down how you feel before and after you eat or drink something.

Rating	How I feel	What to do
1	Starving, headache, shaky, dizzy	Start eating
2	Really hungry, change in mood	Start eating
3	Hungry, growling stomach, decrease in energy	Start eating
4	Kind of hungry	Plan to eat soon

5	Neither hungry nor full	No action needed
6	Kind of full	Plan to stop eating soon
7	No longer hungry, full	Stop eating
8	Full and kind of uncomfortable	Stop eating
9	Really full, uncomfortable	Stop eating
10	Uncomfortably full or stuffed	Stop eating

Next time you feel like eating. Ask yourself – am I hungry? What, if any, signs of hunger do I feel? Checking in with yourself more frequently can allow you to catch earlier cues of hunger and fullness.

Staying between 3 and 7 will help you avoid becoming uncomfortably hungry or full, leaving you energized to enjoy whatever the holidays have to offer.

## References

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