

Eating Hygiene 101



Welcome to Eating Hygiene 101! Although often-overlooked, good eating hygiene is a simple (& free!) way to support your digestion and get the most out of what you eat. Get ready to learn practical tips to elevate your eating habits and make a positive impact on your well-being!

Overview

1. Pay attention
2. Slow down!
3. Chew, chew, chew!
4. Support your MMC

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Pay Attention

It takes practice to become in tune with your body's hunger cues and respond accordingly, especially when many of us were raised with set mealtimes and orders to "clean your plate. Although intentions were likely good, developing a habit of eating that separates us from recognizing our internal hunger and fullness cues can lead to over or under eating later on. Understanding and improving our relationship to hunger and how we eat is the first step of eating hygiene.

1 Do you recognize your body's hunger and fullness cues?

Take time to reflect:

When's the last time you felt hungry?

How do you respond to your hunger?

When do you notice you start feeling full- during a meal or only after you've scarfed down too much food and feel stuffed?

2 Which foods & portion sizes satisfy your hunger best?

If you find yourself constantly feeling hungry, consider whether the foods you typically eat are supplying the right nutrients to keep you satisfied.

Take time to reflect:

What foods cause cravings after eating instead of feeling satiated/satisfied?

What foods & portions do you eat that you both enjoy but also make you feel amazing after eating (give you energy, full but not bloated, etc.)?

3 What timing works best for your body?

If you find yourself constantly feeling hungry, consider whether the foods you typically consume are supplying the necessary nutrients to keep you satisfied. How do your energy levels fluctuate on days when you skip or postpone meals? Does waiting to eat help you make healthier food choices, or do you end up opting for fast food?



4

Limit liquid intake during meals.

I know this seems random, but it's important! Your stomach can only hold so much at one time. Too many liquids with meals can take up space in your stomach and send mixed signals to your brain about your fullness, while possibly diluting the stomach acid and digestive enzymes needed to digest the food.

Hydration is important but it's better to focus on food intake rather than liquid intake during mealtimes. Enjoying a small amount of liquids with your meal is totally fine, but meet your hydration goals between meals, not during.

Slow Down!

Every meal is a chance to relax and help our bodies digest food properly. But let's be real—most of us are always in a rush. Just because it's normal doesn't mean there aren't consequences: rushing can lead to a variety of digestive issues, including choking, upset stomach, nausea, bloating, indigestion, and even problems with nutrient absorption. Over time, eating this way can lead to weight gain and even contribute to nutrient deficiencies.

Why? If we don't slow down we can send mixed signals to our nervous system, stay in "fight or flight" mode instead of switching to the other operating mode ideal for digesting food: "rest and digest." The body misses the signals that it is safe, so it stays alert & doesn't prioritize digestion or nutrient absorption.

So, activating our "Rest & Digest" mode can really make a difference!



There are many ways to activate “Rest and Digest” mode:

- ✓ **When at all possible, sit down to eat your meals.**
If you can sit with loved ones or friends, even better.
- ✓ **Eat without distraction.** Watching TV or looking at your phone distracts you from how fast you are eating, how much you are eating, and any hunger and fullness cues your body is giving you!
- ✓ **Before eating, set an intention to be present & slow down.** Give yourself a moment to settle and take a breath before digging in. Really look at the colors and textures, and notice how it smells. This literally get the digestive juices flowing: The saliva in your mouth begins the process of digestion by secreting enzymes that break down carbohydrates
- ✓ **Eat mindfully— savor flavors!** Sense the temperature and textures. Don't rush to the next bite! Eat what you enjoy so you can enjoy what you eat.
- ✓ **Some people find setting their fork or spoon down between bites helps them get out of the habit of rushing through meals.**

Chew, Chew, Chew!

Did you know you're supposed to chew each bite to applesauce consistency before swallowing? Depending on the food this could take up to 30 chews, but the average is only about 5 times! Chewing more not only slows us down, it breaks the food into smaller pieces and starts digestion by exposing the food to digestive enzyme in the saliva. Feeling like food is “like a rock” in your stomach is one of the key indicators you aren't chewing enough, along with bloating and indigestion.



Chewing helps digestion in 3 main ways:

1 Chewing mechanically breaks the food into smaller pieces so our stomach can more easily digest the food.

The goal is to get your food to an applesauce consistency before it arrives to the stomach. Your stomach doesn't have teeth, so if food isn't chewed well it has a much harder time breaking it down.

2 Chewing signals your body to start producing enzymes in your mouth, stomach, intestines, liver, & even pancreas.

These enzymes break down carbohydrates, fats, and proteins into smaller pieces so your body can absorb the nutrients in your food! The more you chew, the more time your body has to produce the enzymes needed to keep up with the amount of food you're eating.

3 The more you chew, the better your stomach is able to communicate to your brain about your fullness levels.

It takes roughly 20 minutes for your stomach to communicate with your brain that you are satisfied. Slowing down and chewing more thoroughly enhances this connection, allowing you to be more in tune with your body's needs.

Support Your Migrating Motor Complex!

The Migrating Motor Complex (MMC) is part of the nervous system in your stomach and intestines that keeps the food moving through your gastrointestinal tract. It's activated by fasting & stopped by eating, so if we are constantly eating during the day it slows down the time food passes through our system. This can lead to a lot of uncomfortable issues like poor digestion, inferior nutrient absorption, nausea, constipation, and even small intestinal bacterial overgrowth! So how exactly do you support your MMC?



References

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Created by:

Elisabeth Bojang, RN, BSN, MSNE

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