Hunger and Fullness

What’s really going on with my stomach?
Your stomach is a muscle. Its size depends on when and how much you have eaten. The physical feeling of hunger occurs when your stomach is empty. When you are physically hungry, any food will satisfy you, and this is actually a good thing!

Fullness, or satiety, is the sense of feeling full during a meal that causes you to stop eating and lasts until the next time you eat. It helps to regulate how often and how much you eat.

To start:
1. Check in before and after meals as a family to report on hunger/fullness.
2. When your body feels “full” or “hungry”, say this aloud. Let your child know that you are noticing these cues in your own body and will either eat or stop eating because of them.
3. If your child starts asking for food 20 minutes after they have eaten, ask them what is going on. Developing an understanding of what your child is really saying when they say, “I’m hungry” is helpful to help solve your child’s actual problem.
4. Keep practicing – it takes time.

Hunger Scale FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN (AGES 5-10)
The good news is that there are simple tools we can use to help ourselves begin to reconnect with our bodies and better understand our feelings of hunger and fullness. One of these tools is a hunger scale.

Way too hungry. I should have eaten sooner
I was hungry and ate just enough to feel full but have a happy tummy.
I ate way too much and am feeling very uncomfortable.

Source: https://www.coachtiffanyrn.com/blog/how-to-use-a-hunger-scale
**FOR YOUTH**

**Hunger and Fullness**

**How to use a hunger scale:**

1. **Look at each point on the hunger scale.** Think about a time where you have felt like you were at a 0. What did your body feel like then? What did you do; what did you eat? Next, think about a time you were at a 10. What were you doing before you got to a 10? What and how much did you eat? Now think about the other numbers on the hunger scale and how your body felt, what you were doing and what you ate.

2. Start to **check in with your body** using the hunger scale before you eat. Say to yourself, “I think I’m at a 4. I’m ready to eat.” OR “I think I’m full because I feel satisfied and I’m at a 7.”

3. If you notice that you are thinking about food but are not hungry (at a 5 or so) or are full (at a 7 or above), it’s a good cue to help yourself **notice what else is going on for you**.

Are you feeling bored? Are you wanting attention? Are you feeling sad or stressed? Helping yourself understand why you are craving food when your body is not physically hungry can help you better know what to do to address what is actually happening for you.

4. **Try to eat regular, consistent meals throughout the day.** Knowing that you are going to eat again and knowing when you are going to eat again frees you up to focus on eating enough at your current meal to feel full and satisfied.

**Hunger Scale**

**FOR OLDER CHILDREN (AGES 11+):**

- Empty, feeling faint or sick because you are so hungry, as if you haven’t eaten for days.
- Starving, your stomach is growling. You are easily irritated and irritable. Ravenous.
- You are hungry, you feel a little low on energy and are slightly uncomfortable.
- You feel hungry but signs and symptoms are manageable.
- You feel neutral though hunger is on the horizon.
- You are comfortable and can eat with control.
- You are feeling full. Stop eating or don’t start eating yet.
- Feeling too full, a few too many bites.
- Uncomfortable full, bloated.
- Thanksgiving Day full. Not hungry at all. You never want to look at food again.
- When you are this hungry, eat with caution as overeating is easy to do. Carry snacks with you and plan ahead so you don’t feel this way very often.

It’s time to eat. You are hungry and food sounds great. You have more self-control here than at 1, 2, or 3. You can practice mindful, healthy eating.

If you find yourself picking around in the refrigerator, ask yourself what is it that you REALLY need or want. Are you bored? Tired? Avoiding other tasks? Be honest with yourself. You are full; you don’t need to eat.

**References:**


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