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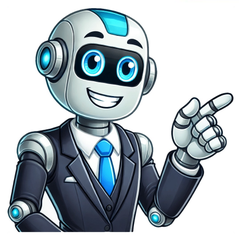

If you've ever heard of intuitive eating, you might assume that it's just another diet trend — but you'd be wrong. In a world full of fad diets, this eating philosophy offers something completely different. Something kinder, gentler and more sustainable.Psychologist Susan Albers, PsyD, explains what intuitive eating is, what it can do for you and how to begin working its philosophies into your life.What is intuitive eating?"Intuitive eating is the polar opposite of dieting," Dr. Albers says. "Instead of following rules and restricting what you eat, you trust your internal hunger, fullness and satiety cues to help you decide what and how much to eat. No food is off the table."Registered dietitian Evelyn Tribole and nutrition therapist Elyse Resch coined the term in their 1995 book Intuitive Eating, which took into account research and clinical work done by others before them.More than 125 studies explore intuitive eating. A review of 97 of them found that it's associated with:Positive body image and self-esteem.Lower rates of disordered eating.Higher general well-being."Intuitive eating is about making peace with food," Dr. Albers says. "It's about learning how to listen to your body and how to honor your hunger."The 10 principles of eating intuitivelyIntuitive eating asks you to unlearn the negative messages about food and eating that society has taught you to believe. "We all have an internal eater in us, but it's buried under diet culture," Dr. Albers says. "With dieting, you follow rules; with intuitive eating, you listen to your hunger cues."If you've spent years dieting and following self-imposed food rules, it can be a challenge to learn to identify and trust your hunger cues. Rather than trying to start all at once, Dr. Albers suggests trying a 10-day challenge."Each day, focus on one of the principles," she suggests. "Notice how it comes up, how you can put it into practice, some of your challenges and struggles, and how it improves your life."She explains the principles of intuitive eating and how to incorporate them into your life.1. Reject diet mentalityHave you ever noticed all of the messages you receive about food and dieting? From social media, advertisements and even chit-chat among friends, talk about the latest trendy diets and diet products is everywhere."Rejecting diet mentality means letting go of everything related to dieting," Dr. Albers explains. "It's recognizing and actively rejecting diet culture and everything it stands for that is harmful to your body."Example: You see an advertisement that indicates peanut butter is fattening. You recognize this as diet culture and continue to eat peanut butter because you love it.Put it into action: Try to identify and recognize when you're being influenced by diet culture. Dr. Albers recommends an activity she calls "I Spy Diet Culture." Notice how often you see diet ads, articles about unhealthy eating styles and even language that celebrates weight loss, like "skinny jeans.""You'll be amazed how often it pops up, seemingly everywhere you look," she says.2. Honor your hungerLongtime dieting teaches us to ignore our hunger cues. But hunger is a biological response, and you wouldn't ignore your body's other biological responses, would you? You don't try to suppress breathing, blinking or your urge to pee — yet we try to ignore our hunger all the time."Hunger is not your enemy or something to be avoided," Dr. Albers says. "Intuitive eating is about listening to your hunger and learning to respond to what it needs."Example: You know you have a tendency to get hangry, so you put some mixed nuts in your purse to eat when you start to feel cranky.Put it into action: Dr. Albers explains, "The key to living this principle is to ask yourself: What are you hungry for? And what is your hunger telling you that you need or want?" As simple as it sounds, practice eating when you're hungry and trying to figure out what food your body is asking for.3. Make peace with foodMaybe you haven't eaten bread for years, or you never eat after 7 p.m. This principle asks you to start breaking those rules and doing away with them entirely."To make peace with food is to stop fighting with food," Dr. Albers says. "This includes putting an end to language that indicates that you're at war with food, like, 'I can't eat that,' or 'I shouldn't have this.'"Example: You have a hard-and-fast rule about only eating brown rice, even though you love the taste of white rice. Recognizing that your overall pattern of eating impacts your health more than any one meal, you start to occasionally swap in white rice.Put it into action: It's time to start saying "I can" instead of "I could never." Be gentle with yourself as you try to recognize and do away with judgmental, guilt-ridden thoughts."This can be a radical shift for people who avoid certain foods out of shame or guilt," Dr. Albers notes.4. Challenge the food policeHave you ever had a slice of cake at a birthday party and then beat yourself up about how "bad" you were? Or eaten a salad for lunch and praised yourself for being "good"?If so, you're well-acquainted with the food police — the voice in your head that criticizes and judges what you eat. "These food rules aren't laws, but they can feel very punitive if you don't follow them," Dr. Albers says. "Food isn't good or bad, but this is a shift in language if you grew up thinking about it that way."Example: You're craving chocolate, so you buy a small chocolate bar and enjoy every bite. You feel happy and satisfied instead of guilty or ashamed.Put it into action: Try to identify where the voice of the food police comes from. Sometimes, it's your own internal judgment; other times, it's an external voice, like a partner or parent making critical comments about your size.Once you identify these rules, you can begin to dismantle them. "You have to ask: Why are you creating these food rules? And importantly, are these rules helpful to you or not?" Dr. Albers says. "Often, they're unhelpful and arbitrary."5. Discover the satisfactionDo you eat what you feel like you're supposed to eat, or do you eat what will satisfy you? For many of us, it's the former. And while eating is a biological requirement, the foods you choose should also bring you some joy."Eating should be an enjoyable experience," Dr. Albers says. "This includes tasting pleasurable foods." If you're eating something that just isn't satisfying you, it's probably a sign that you're not eating what's right for you in the moment.Example: You're in the mood for something crunchy and healthy, so you aim to find a snack to satisfy that taste — maybe celery with peanut butter or carrots with hummus.Put it into action: As you begin a meal or while you're eating, ask yourself: Is this the food I want? Does it make me feel satisfied? Is there anything that might better satisfy me?6. Feel your fullnessIf principle five is all about mental satisfaction, then principle six is about physical satisfaction. Is your body getting what it needs from the food you're eating? "Your body gives you signals that it is hungry and full," Dr. Albers says.Example: You haven't eaten everything on your plate, but you're feeling full, so you stop eating instead of pressuring yourself to join the "clean plate club" of your youth.Put it into action: "Check in with your body to listen for cues of fullness and whether you're feeling physically satisfied," Dr. Albers advises. "Does what you're eating resonate with your body and your hunger?"Using a scale from 1 to 10, ask yourself how you'd rate your hunger level in this moment. One is extremely hungry, and 10 is stuffed.7. Cope with your emotions with kindnessHere's a mantra to remember: Food doesn't fix feelings. But often, we eat because we're bored, stressed, anxious or sad — in other words, for emotional reasons."Food and feelings are so intertwined with each other," Dr. Albers says. "This principle is about finding kind ways to nurture, distract, comfort and cope with your feelings with activities that help you to reduce your stress rather than with food."Example: You're feeling stressed and start to look for some candy. When you pause, though, you realize it's not candy you need but a way to relax and destress. You do a meditation instead.Put it into action: Make a list of other ways to respond to your emotions: yoga, reading a book, going for a walk, etc. Then, when you're compelled to stress-eat, spend some time thinking about how you're feeling."Instead of making a beeline for food, pause and ask, 'What am I feeling? And what does this feeling need?'" Dr. Albers advises. This will help you differentiate between physical hunger cues and emotion-driven eating.Oh, and by the way: Sometimes, the answer is food, and that's all right, too. "A little bit of stress-eating now and then can be OK," Dr. Albers reassures. "But when we turn to food over and over again to soothe or comfort our feelings, it becomes a bigger issue."8. Respect your bodyWhile diet and exercise do play a big role in the size and shape of your body, there's a lot more to it than that — including your genes."Everybody is different, and we are influenced heavily by our genetic blueprint," Dr. Albers says. "We can't diet our way into a body that is not made for us."Intuitive eating recognizes and respects size diversity and the idea that all bodies are worthy of celebration.Example: Some of your clothes no longer fit. Instead of holding onto them and hoping you're eventually small enough to wear them again, you donate them. Then, you fill your closet with clothes that fit and make you feel good.Put it into action: If body positivity seems too far-fetched for you, work toward body neutrality. "Because of diet culture, jumping right into loving your body can be so difficult for people," Dr. Albers says. "Instead, it might be easier to start with accepting your body as it is — what it does for you, how it helps you."9. MovementIf you equate movement with exercise — and subsequently, with dread — you can probably blame diet culture. But there's another way. Rather than exercising to burn calories, this principle recognizes that it feels good to move."Intuitive eating encourages you to do movements that bring you joy," Dr. Albers explains. "And notice that it's about movement, not exercise because sometimes exercise makes people think, 'I've got to sweat and lose calories.'"Example: You decide to go for a walk instead of running. You know running burns more calories, but you can't stand doing it, whereas walking makes you happy.Put it into action: Explore ways to move that you enjoy and that make you feel strong and energized, whether it's dancing, walking your dog, surfing or playing tennis. "Notice how your body feels when it's active," adds Dr. Albers.10. Honor your health with gentle nutritionThe other nine principles are about tuning in to your internal needs, but intuitive eating isn't asking you to forget everything you've been taught about nutrition. This principle asks you to turn to science to understand your body's needs."Food science informs us about how certain foods impact our appetite, health and fullness," Dr. Albers says.Example: You notice that whenever you have toast for breakfast, you become hungry almost immediately afterward. You start putting peanut butter on your morning toast, which keeps you fuller for longer.Put it into action: Work on melding the internal (how you feel about what you eat) with the external (food science) to figure out what food choices will satisfy your overlapping needs.Is intuitive eating the same as mindful eating?There's a lot of overlap between intuitive eating and mindful eating, which encourages awareness of your internal and external experiences related to food. Mindful eating means paying attention to every experience related to eating, including taste, emotions, thoughts and how your body responds to the food you eat.The main difference between the two is that intuitive eating has 10 principles and specifically calls for the rejection of diet culture."They both aim to help people honor, hear and respond to their hunger in conscious ways," Dr. Albers says. "You can be eating intuitively and mindfully at the same time."Can intuitive eating help you lose weight?If you're looking to intuitive eating for weight loss, you may not initially like this answer: "The goal of intuitive eating is not weight loss," Dr. Albers says. "Weight loss is part of diet culture. It pushes you into shame and guilt in a way that focusing on improving your health and your joy around food do not."Some people, she says, do lose weight because they're able to stop unhealthy behaviors like binge-eating. But other people gain weight, especially if they've been restricting or dieting for a long time."It comes down to the fact that your body will do whatever it needs to do," Dr. Albers says. "That can be tough to wrap our minds around because it's so different from the diet mentality that promises you'll lose 10 pounds in 10 days."Intuitive eating doesn't make those kinds of promises. But what it does promise is a better relationship with your body and with food — which actually sounds a lot healthier, happier and more sustainable, doesn't it?To learn more from Dr. Albers about intuitive eating, listen to the Health Essentials Podcast episode, "Understanding Intuitive Eating." New episodes of the Health Essentials Podcast publish every Wednesday. However, it was in 1995 that two dietitians, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, developed the theory of intuitive eating, including its core principles.Intuitive eating is said to be about "you making the best choice for you"; to eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full. The behaviour of babies is used as an example, as they instinctively cry when they need to eat. Advocates of intuitive eating insist that hunger should also be an intuitive response for adults, and they draw a line of distinction between physical hunger and emotional hunger.Physical hunger can be experienced by signs such as a growling stomach, tiredness, or irritability. These then pass when food is consumed.Emotional hunger, on the other hand, is described as being influenced by negative emotions that create cravings for food or are soothed by food, such as sadness, loneliness, boredom and stress.It is argued that, by eating intuitively, you learn to trust your body, and identify when it is a physical or emotional hunger, then make better choices about what to eat..Discover our full range of health guides, whether it's 10 ways to eat less meat or all you need to know about protein.According to American nutritionists Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, who founded the theory of intuitive eating, these are the guiding principles to guarding against dysfunctional eating habits:Forget the idea that dieting or restricting the foods you eat in any way will result in quick, easy or permanent weight loss. Intuitive eating is the opposite of a diet – it is about learning to trust your body to choose what it needs.Learn to feed your body when you experience the early signs of hunger. If you leave it too long and feel too hungry, you are more likely to make poor food choices and overeat. Listening to your body and its biological signals sets the stage for rebuilding trust in both yourself and food. Read more on how to stop binge-eating and how you can manage your appetite.Instead of thinking about different kinds of food as 'good' or 'bad', learn to listen to what your body needs. It may make you less likely to crave 'forbidden' food or binge eat.Question negative thoughts or comments that you may have that affect the food choices you make. For example, telling yourself you've been 'good' if you didn't go over your calorie goal for the day, or feeling 'bad' because you ate chocolate.Enjoying eating – both the food and the environment you're in – will help you to feel content and satisfied. When you eat what you really want, and you enjoy the experience, you may find that you need less food to satisfy you.Listen for your body's cues that you are comfortably full, just as it gives you the physical signs when it is hungry.Food can't fix feelings. It offers a short-term solution to distract or numb them, which is why people often turn to emotional eating. Become aware of those times when you may be emotionally eating, and find ways to help you cope that don't involve food, such as walking, journaling or meditating. Read 6 tools to manage stress and 10 diet and lifestyle tips to help manage stress.Learn to accept and respect your body whatever its shape or size. Read more in weight and body fat – the facts.Get active and pay attention to how it feels to move your body, rather than tracking how many calories you may have burned.You don't have to eat perfectly to be healthy. Make food choices that take both your health and your taste buds into account, while making you feel good. You won't become unhealthy or nutrient-deficient from one snack, one meal or one day of eating. It is about progress, not perfection.Intuitive eating is not pitched as an approach to weight loss, but reducing emotional food consumption, or eating more in tune with your body's hunger and fullness cues. Its founders say it can help create more ordered eating, which could result in weight loss, but they insist that being overly concerned with calorie counting or consciously choosing low-fat foods is contrary to the principles of intuitive eating.If you're interested in trying intuitive eating, note that it is a long-term approach based on changing the way you think about food and becoming better attuned to the physical cues for hunger. There aren't any plans or recipes to follow, just a series of behaviours that are intended to redefine your relationship with food.Interested in trying intuitive eating? Why not let us know how it goes in the comments below?How to stop binge eating 5 ways the food you eat affects your brain How to eat fish sustainably Comfort food recipes Top 10 mood-boosting foods Nicola Shubrook is a qualified nutritionist registered with the British Association for Nutrition and Lifestyle Medicine (BANT) and the Complementary & Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC). Find out more at urbanwellness.co.uk.All health content on bbcgoodfood.com is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other healthcare professional. If you have any concerns about your general health, you should contact your local healthcare provider. See our website terms and conditions for more information. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Reviewed by: Pam Ruhland, PN2, Certified Intuitive Eating Lay Facilitator What is it? | Principles | Weight loss | Mindful eating | Advice for coaches Many people think they know what "intuitive eating" means. And a lot of them are wrong. They'll say things like: "Intuitive eating is eating whatever you want, whenever you want." "If you're not on a diet, you're already eating intuitively." Or everyone's personal favorite: "It just means 'listen to your body.'" But none of those are accurate, at least not according to the people who coined the term. And that matters. Whether you're interested in practicing intuitive eating yourself, or you're a coach considering using it with your clients, you'll want to know what intuitive eating is and isn't—so you can decide whether it's the right tool for the job. In this article, you'll discover: The 10 principles of intuitive eating. Why intuitive eating might be right—or wrong—for you (or your clients). A number of handy ways to try intuitive eating—starting today. Ready? Let's dig in. ++++ Over 150,000 health & fitness professionals certified First popularized by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch in their 1995 book Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Anti-Diet Approach, intuitive eating rejects diet culture, a set of beliefs that values thinness, appearance, and shape above health and well-being. This framework enthusiastically welcomes people of all sizes, helping them to improve their relationships with food, mind, and body without encouraging them to lose an ounce. Intuitive eating also forgoes typical eating rules (think weighing, measuring) and instead helps people rediscover body cues like hunger and fullness. That sounds great, of course. But can it really work? For many people, intuitive eating can be powerfully transformative. By the time we hit our 20s, most of us are eating for lots of reasons besides actual hunger. 6 pm? Time for dinner. Bored? Let's see what's in the fridge. Rough day? Give me a spoon and some cookies n' cream. But imagine how life might work out if we ate like babies. Babies naturally eat intuitively, stopping when they're full, no matter how much milk or formula is left. They don't go to battle with themselves thinking, "I want more. But, no, I shouldn't. But, my gosh, it tastes so good. A little more won't be so bad, right? What is wrong with me? Why can't I stop?! Okay, I know. I'll do 250 crawling laps around the room to burn off the extra milk…" Intuitive eating helps people get closer to this natural instinct again. If you want to understand what intuitive eating has to offer, the 10 principles are a great place to start. One way to use these principles: Work through them in order. Master one, and then move on to the next, which is what the creators originally intended. Principle #1: Reject the diet mentality. Intuitive eating isn't about weight loss, and that's precisely what attracted Lisa Dahl, PN2, a Certified Intuitive Eating Lay Facilitator and body image coach. She'd noticed that many of her clients felt stressed and upset when they stepped on the scale or tracked their measurements. So when she discovered intuitive eating, she shifted her entire coaching practice away from weight loss. That shift had a major impact on Dahl's clients and her coaching: "When we removed the diet mentality, we shifted our focus to behaviors and actions that were making them feel better—regardless of the number on the scale. It became a much more positive experience for both of us." If you're interested in trying this approach, think about your goals outside of weight loss by using a thought experiment called The 5 Whys. You start with the question: What do you want to accomplish? And then ask yourself why five times to get to the root of what you really want. Often, people start by saying they want to lose weight. By the end, they end up with goals about confidence, happiness, and having a good life—all of which can be achieved without weight loss. To learn more about how to use The 5 Whys to reject the diet mentality, see: Are you body-shaming clients? How well-meaning coaches can be guilty of "size-bias." This is a loaded question. But there are a few important points to consider. ➤ #1: Not everyone who's "overweight" or "obese" is unhealthy. Just as not everyone who's at a "normal" body weight is healthy. ➤ #2: Focusing on weight loss simply doesn't work for everyone. If it did, people would go on one diet, get the results they want, and never diet again. It's safe to say that's a pretty rare occurrence. "We have to get rid of this idea that weight loss is always a good choice. It's just not," says Precision Nutrition Coach Jon Mills, PN2. "We tend to think that if you lose weight, you'll get healthier. But if that comes with disordered eating, extra stress, and more body issues, weight loss isn't the healthy choice." ➤ #3: People who "need to lose weight" are constantly getting lectured about their bodies. "I have so many clients who, every time they go to the doctor, no matter what the problem is, the doctor's like, 'You should lose weight,'" says Mills. "We don't need more people in the world being like, 'Hey, have you considered losing weight?' That messaging is saturated." If a person decides intuitive eating is right for them, regardless of their size, that's their choice to make. Principle #2: Honor your hunger. The more we try to resist hunger, the more we want to eat. (Thank evolution for that one.) And once we get extremely hungry? Our plan to eat a perfectly portioned chicken breast with a side of kale becomes a bucket of fried chicken with mashed potatoes and a side of cheesecake. The solution? When you're hungry—eat. But that begs the question: How do you know when you're truly hungry? Try ranking your hunger on a scale of 1-10. Usually, we think of 7 as "time to eat," but what feels right for you might be different. Letting your hunger guide you may mean eating at new and different times. For instance, you may normally eat breakfast at 9 am out of habit. But maybe you're super hungry right after you wake up at 7:30 am. Or you may find you're not actually hungry until 10 am. Whatever your body tells you, go with it. Principle #3: Make peace with food. Give yourself unconditional permission to eat. "When people are restricting really hard, that pushes them into binge eating and shame eating and emotional eating. You'll never address a restriction problem with more restriction. It just doesn't work," says Mills. If you've ever gone on a super restrictive diet and then crashed and burned face-first into a tub of caramel popcorn, you know what we're talking about. The goal of making peace with food is to avoid situations like that. But in order to get there, intuitive eating says you need to welcome yourself to eat that caramel popcorn whenever you want. You're probably wondering: Won't unconditional permission lead to donuts the size of people's heads coupled with a lifetime without vegetables? Not usually. Quite often, the opposite happens. Once people allow themselves to eat what they really want, their cravings suddenly don't feel as urgent. That yearning for a whole box of cookies eventually turns into a more manageable desire for just one or two. Fair warning, this principle can take a while to master. One thing that might help: Self-compassion, which is an attitude of generosity, honesty, and kindness towards yourself. Try to notice what you say to yourself when you eat—especially if you are going for foods that you haven't given yourself permission to eat in the past. If your internal chatter is negative, take a deep breath and consider: "Is this how I would talk to someone I love?" If not, think about what you might say to a friend who is trying to break free from a negative relationship with food. Then say those words—to yourself. For a full rundown of how to give yourself permission to eat, along with several ways to use self compassion, see: Solutions for stress eating. Principle #4: Challenge the food police. The food police are those little people in your head telling you not to eat such a big portion, that this food is "good," and that food is "bad." Of course, once those annoying head mates deem a food "bad," that food becomes all the more attractive and irresistible. So stop using phrases like "good foods" "bad foods" and "cheat meals," recommends Denise Allen, a Precision Nutrition Women's Coach. If you're planning a special meal that goes outside of what you'd normally eat, you could try calling it a "choice" meal instead of a cheat one, Allen says. Even better, don't label it anything at all. It's just a meal—there's no need to assign morality to it. "Language and words matter so much, and how you talk to yourself about this process makes a difference," Allen adds. To learn more about labeling foods, see: We've told 100,000 clients, "There are no bad foods." And we're not about to stop. Here's why. Principle #5: Discover the satisfaction factor. Taking pleasure in what you eat—enjoying food that you truly like in a comfortable environment—helps you innately decide when you've had "enough" to eat, whatever that means to you. To do it, consider transforming your meals into an event. Rather than scarfing things down over the sink or in the car, sit down—at a table. Maybe put some mood music on. Then consciously think about: What does your meal taste like? What's the texture like? What does the chair you're sitting in feel like? Who are you eating with? Is that part of your meal enjoyable? What's good about your experience of eating this meal? Principle #6: Feel your fullness. As you eat, look and listen for the signs you're no longer hungry. Imagine your fullness on a scale from 1 to 10. One is "I don't feel like I've eaten at all" and 10 is "I'm completely full and can't eat any more." Five is something like "I've eaten some food, but I definitely have room for more." Ask yourself (or your client): What level of fullness feels right to you? Some people might want to be at a 7 or 8 when they're done eating. Others might want to get closer to 9 or 10. If you struggle to stay tuned in for an entire meal, try checking in just three times: during the first, middle, and last bites. (Of course, the middle bite will usually be approximate.) Experiment until you figure out what's right for you. Principle #7: Cope with your emotions with kindness. Intuitive eating nudges you to ask important questions, especially when you find yourself turning to food when you're not physically hungry. Rather than berating yourself, you gently explore what's really going on by asking yourself: "What do I really need? Is it connection? Better relationships? Am I feeling tired, stressed, frustrated?" Those questions might lead you to much more nourishing solutions that happen to be located far outside of the kitchen. "Intuitive eating is about being willing to listen, trust, and respect your thoughts and body," Dahl adds. "It's not a free-for-all; it's actually about digging deep. It takes time, patience, practice, and self-compassion." One great resource to get you (or a client) started: The Break The Chain Worksheet, which helps you examine what's really behind experiences like stress eating, cravings, and feeling out of control around food. Principle #8: Respect your body. Stop measuring your body against outside standards of how it "should" look. Instead, try to accept your body as it is. In a world where we're bombarded with images of what our bodies are "supposed" to look like, this is often a challenge. But it's crucial. All bodies are different, and for many of us, it can be helpful to accept that our bodies may never look like the ones on the cover of fitness magazines. With intuitive eating, you're encouraged to lean into that and practice not feeling bad about it. Principle #9: Movement—feel the difference. Choose movement that feels good to you, and that you genuinely enjoy. Hate running? Don't force it. Love Zumba? Stick with that. Or maybe you don't like purposeful workouts at all. In that case, you might just focus on moving your body as much as possible throughout the day. Principle #10: Honor your health—with gentle nutrition. Intuitive eating is basically the opposite of most other approaches when it comes to how they handle the nutrition piece. Generally, diets focus on the relative health of various foods and what to eat before anything else. Intuitive eating, on the other hand, deliberately does the opposite. You focus first on tapping into hunger and fullness signals, emotional awareness around food, and body respect. Then you start talking about practical points like how much protein you need or the idea that adding veggies to your meal is usually a good move. And even when you consider these nutritional fundamentals, you do so hand-in-hand with pleasure. This isn't about forcing yourself to eat nutritious foods that you hate. As Precision Nutrition super coach Kate Solovieva says, "It does not matter how good kale is for you, if you hate kale." Who should try intuitive eating? When it comes to choosing an eating strategy, it's all about picking the right tool for the right job. So consider your (or your client's) goals before making a decision on whether to try intuitive eating. Intuitive eating fits these goals: ✓ Improving your relationship with food ✓ Recovering from disordered eating ✓ Reducing guilt around food ✓ Letting go of diet culture ✓ Getting to know your hunger and fullness signals ✓ Living as well as you can for as long as you can For these goals, intuitive eating isn't the best choice: ✓ Purposeful weight loss or body composition changes ✓ Preparing for an athletic competition or performance that has specific nutrient needs ✓ Changing the way your body looks for a modeling or acting job Caveat: Intuitive eating principles can benefit athletes and people who get paid for their appearance when combined with other nutritional strategies. But again, intuitive eating isn't meant to be used for purposeful weight loss, and it alone probably won't help them reach their goals. Intuitive eating and mindful eating often get confused, probably because they're similar in many ways. Here's yet another alternative: blending mindful eating and parts of intuitive eating with nutrition fundamentals. That's what we do at Precision Nutrition. We're agnostic when it comes to the best way to eat, but we do incorporate some principles of both mindful and intuitive eating with our clients and in our certification. We teach clients how to sense into their hunger and fullness, notice and name the thoughts and emotions that trigger cravings, and to eat slowly and deeply enjoy every bite. In addition, we show clients how to include protein and veggies with meals. And for people interested in fat loss, we explain how to tap into hunger and fullness cues to eat to 80 percent full. Whether or not you agree with the premise of intuitive eating, it's worth exposing yourself to the methodology, Mills says. Aside from the book by Tribole and Resch, you might also want to check out some of the following resources: Some coaches reject intuitive eating without truly exploring it, Mills points out. "But it speaks to a really prevalent demographic, which is people who have been deeply hurt by diet culture. And when you understand that context, intuitive eating makes perfect sense." If you're a coach, or you want to be… You can help people build sustainable nutrition and lifestyle habits that will significantly improve their physical and mental health—while you make a great living doing what you love. We'll show you how. If you'd like to learn more, consider the PN Level 1 Nutrition Coaching Certification. (You can enroll now at a big discount.) Years of research demonstrate that for most people, rigid dietary patterns do not lead to sustained weight loss or improved psychological well-being. Many of us have firsthand experience of the difficulties of dieting, and it's no surprise that we might be looking for alternatives. A practice known as intuitive eating—with a focus on becoming in tune with your body's hunger and fullness signals and combating black-and-white thinking around food choices—is a potential option.Intuitive eating is a frequent buzzword and has become increasingly popular in recent years, but confusion exists around what this approach is all about. This article will dive deeper into what intuitive eating is, clarify related terms, and explain what the research says about intuitive eating's effect on health outcomes.What is intuitive eating?Intuitive eating was created by two registered dietitians, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, and first published in a book of the same name in 1995. As noted by the creators, intuitive eating is a "self-care eating framework rooted in science and supported by clinical experience." It's based on ten principles, quoted below:Reject the diet mentality;Honor your hunger;Make peace with food;Challenge the food police;Respect your fullness;Discover the satisfaction factor;Honor your feelings;Respect your body;Movement—feel the difference; andHonor your health with gentle nutritionWhile intuitive eating does not operate by rules per se, its principles are meant to guide you toward a healthier relationship with food and your body. Intuitive eating works in two primary ways: (1) it helps you get back in tune with your body's signals for hunger, fullness and satisfaction (also known as interoceptive awareness); and (2) it removes obstacles that might prevent you from listening to your body (these obstacles typically are externally motivated food rules and rigid thoughts about eating).It's important to note that advocates for intuitive eating assert that intentionally pursuing weight loss does not allow you to eat intuitively, as doing so inhibits you from listening to your body's signals. This does not mean that it's impossible to lose weight while eating intuitively; however, weight loss is not the main goal of the practice.What else do I need to know?Intuitive eating fits into the Health at Every Size® (HAES®) paradigm, which is a weight-inclusive (also called weight-neutral) approach to health as opposed to an approach that places emphasis on body weight.Essentially, weight-inclusive or weight-neutral means that body size will not be the main parameter for assessing someone's health status. Intuitive eating, HAES®, and weight-inclusive are all terms that are often bucketed under "the non-diet approach." While we are focusing on the research on intuitive eating, it's helpful to understand the larger context into which this eating framework fits.The research on intuitive eatingWhile intuitive eating is still relatively new, to date there have been about 200 studies evaluating its impact on a myriad of health outcomes. Most often, intuitive eating is assessed in relation to eating pathology (as an antidote to chronic dieting or disordered eating), weight (in comparison with weight-normative approaches), psychological well-being, and attending to hunger and fullness cues.This 2014 literature review on the relationships between intuitive eating and health indicators included 26 articles; 17 were cross-sectional survey studies and nine were clinical studies, eight of which were randomized controlled trials. Because the principles of intuitive eating can be challenging to assess, the review defined intuitive eating as: (i) eating when hungry; (ii) stopping eating when no longer hungry or when full; and (iii) there being no restrictions on types of food eaten with the exception of restrictions for medical reasons.The review's results note: "The cross-sectional surveys indicate that intuitive eating is negatively associated with BMI, positively associated with various psychological health indicators, and possibly positively associated with improved dietary intake and/or eating behaviors, but not associated with higher levels of physical activity. From the clinical studies, we conclude that the implementation of intuitive eating results in weight maintenance but perhaps not weight loss, improved psychological health, possibly improved physical health indicators other than BMI (e.g. blood pressure; cholesterol levels) and dietary intake and/or eating behaviors, but probably not higher levels of physical activity."This 2017 study sought to examine the relationship between rigid control (inflexible dietary rules dictating what, when and how much one should eat), flexible control (a graded approach to eating, defined by behaviors such as taking smaller servings of food to regulate weight, eating a variety of foods in limited quantities and compensating at subsequent meals if "unhealthy" foods were consumed earlier) and intuitive eating on various indicators of disordered eating and body image concerns. The authors collected data online from 372 normal-weight (based on BMI ranges) men and women (mean age of 25) and found that, in contrast to rigid dietary control intuitive eating uniquely and consistently predicted lower levels of disordered eating and body image concerns. The authors note: "This intuitive eating-disordered eating relationship was mediated by low levels of dichotomous thinking and the intuitive eating-body image relationship was mediated by high levels of body appreciation."Furthermore, this 2018 study assessed eating-related and psychological outcomes of a HAES® intervention. For this study, 216 weight-preoccupied (i.e. seeking help for "weight issues/concerns") women who participated in the HAES® intervention were compared with 110 weight-preoccupied women who did not receive an intervention. The two groups were of similar BMI. The HAES® intervention, which focused on healthy lifestyle, self-acceptance, and intuitive eating, entailed 14 weekly meetings provided by health professionals. Eating behaviors and psychological correlates (e.g., body esteem, self-esteem, and depression) were assessed using validated questionnaires first when the study began, then immediately following the intervention period, and finally one year after the intervention. The evaluation of this HAES® intervention in a real-life context showed its effectiveness in improving eating-, weight-, and psychologically related variables among women struggling with weight and body image. The eating-related changes observed in this study are consistent with findings from other research on HAES and intuitive eating.Limitations, summary, and future discussionsThe research on intuitive eating is promising, and its effects on psychological well-being, weight, improved body image, and eating in response to internal cues is becoming more well-documented. However, further studies are needed on more diverse populations. Moreover, the limited sample sizes of most of the studies cited warrants further research and discussion. Still, intuitive eating can be an option for those interested in shifting away from strict dieting rules in favor of a different approach. As always, there are many factors involved when it comes to improving your health, and we always recommend working with your individual healthcare provider or registered dietitian.This article includes contributions from Kris Sollid, Rd. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Intuitive eating (IE) is not so much a diet plan as an approach to eating based on one's internal needs, whether physical, emotional, or other influencers. When these needs are recognized, they may determine one's food choices. Because the method is based on an individual's needs at one moment in time, it does not focus on specific foods, a calorie level to reach, or even eating at certain times. It has been used as an approach to lose weight as well as a treatment strategy for those with disordered eating patterns. The term "intuitive eating" was introduced in 1995 as the title of a book authored by registered dietitians Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch. However, the concept of eating from an emotional response was described by researchers prior to that date. [1] IE is the antithesis of restrained eating that demands rigid control. Many commercial diets follow a restrained eating model, with meal plans that include specific foods and/or measured portions. In contrast, IE focuses on body cues such as hunger and fullness, which may be physical hunger and fullness from an empty or filled stomach, or cues caused by emotional or external triggers. IE is flexible, with no restrictions on types of foods to eat, amounts, or specific mealtimes. IE is sometimes described as this basic concept: learning to eat when hungry and stopping when full. Yet, in our society physical hunger is not the only reason we eat. Our appetites and cravings are continuously stimulated by visual cues (cooking shows, food advertisements), emotional cues (feeling sad, lonely, stressed, bored), olfactory cues (smelling freshly baked bread), or social cues (Sunday family dinners, sharing a restaurant meal with friends). IE seeks to identify the specific cause of the "hunger," and to respond with awareness and intention. Eating in response to triggers other than from physiological cues may cause a feeling of lack of self-control, guilt, or self-condemnation. Practicing IE concepts may help to prevent these negative feelings. Intuitive eating encourages self-care and a positive body image. Weight loss is not a focus of IE. However, eating excess calories can occur from emotional cues, so if one learns to respond appropriately to emotional eating cues, weight loss may follow naturally. Fatigue, lightheadedness Irritability Headache Stomach is grumbling Hunger gradually intensifies No specific cravings; any type of food will satisfy Stomach is quiet Desire for food occurs suddenly (e.g., because of an emotion such as anger or stress, or from external cues such as viewing a television commercial or other food advertising) Cravings are for a specific food or flavor, whether salty, sweet, crunchy, creamy, etc. Guilt is associated with eating Acknowledge hunger. Recognize physical hunger cues and respond to them. These cues will not always occur at consistent times, as true hunger can be influenced by changes in physical activity, lack of sleep, etc. Therefore, eating meals and snacks at the same time every day may not be appropriate according to IE principles, if you are not hungry. Recognize and respond to fullness. As you identify true hunger, you will also learn to identify a comfortable degree of fullness after eating, and respond by stopping eating. This may require periodic check-ins while eating, noting if you are enjoying the food and reaching a point of having enough. Don't fear negative feelings. Accept that negative emotions like stress, anger, and boredom will come and go. Learn to cope with these feelings without using food: talk to a friend, go for a walk, take a shower, pray, or meditate. Honor and respect your body regardless of size and ability. A negative self-image can lead to self-destructive behaviors, whereas nurturing a positive self-image may lead to healthful behaviors. Often used interchangeably, many intuitive eating and mindful eating concepts overlap but there are some key differences. Mindful eating stems from the broader practice of mindfulness, a centuries-old philosophy used in many religions. Mindful eating focuses on the present eating experience with heightened awareness beyond the self, and without judgment. [2] The following are some areas of focus: Considering the wider spectrum of the meal which informs what and how much one eats: where the food came from, what elements were needed from nature that enabled the food to grow and thrive, the individuals involved in getting the food from the farm to grocery stores or restaurants, how the food was prepared, who prepared it. Noticing how the food looks, tastes, smells, and feels in our bodies as we eat. How the body feels after eating the meal. Expressing gratitude for the meal before and/or after eating May use deep breathing or meditation before the meal to transition your busy mind to focus on the meal in front of you. How our food choices affect our local and global environment. Including these considerations when eating can help to increase appreciation, enjoyment, and understanding of the food. Intuitive eating often integrates concepts of mindful eating but also considers eating specifically in response to hunger and satiety cues, nurturing a positive body image, addressing non-physiological reasons for hunger, and physical activity. It usually does not involve meditation nor gratitude. Learn more about mindful eating There is a growing body of research on IE. Small, short-term controlled trials or cross-sectional studies using IE concepts have consistently shown benefits for psychological wellbeing (e.g., reduced depression and anxiety; increased body satisfaction, self-acceptance, and quality of life). [3,4] IE interventions have also shown a decrease in certain behaviors such as binge eating and restrained eating/dieting. A limited number of studies have shown improvements in blood pressure and cholesterol. [5] Randomized trials show conflicting results of IE interventions and weight loss or decreased body mass index; some show no weight changes while others show modest weight reductions. Diet quality A cross-sectional study of 5,238 Swiss men and women were evaluated with self-administered questionnaires assessing intuitive eating behaviors and diet quality. [3] The study found that sco