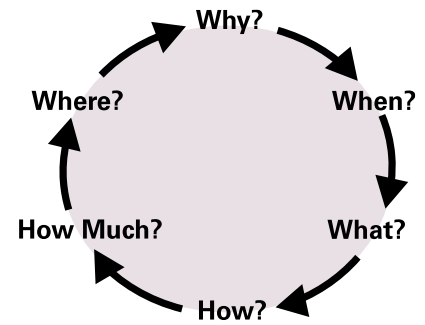


The Eating Cycle

Help patients learn to distinguish their biological need for food from the emotional or environmental cues that trigger an urge to eat or overeat. Use these questions and bite-sized messages to talk to patients about their eating cycles.

The Eating Cycle was developed by family physician Michelle May, MD, FAAFP. For more information go to www.AmIHungry.com.



Decision	Possible Questions to Start the Conversation	Bite-sized Messages
<p>Why? Why do I eat?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think you eat? • Are you aware of any situations of emotions that trigger you to want to eat when you aren't hungry? (Examples: mealtimes, ballgames, certain people, stress, boredom, buffets, getting ready to start a diet) • Have you tried a lot of diets? What happened? How did they work for you long term? Why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instinctive Eating Cycle: Hunger is the primary reason for eating; it is a primitive yet reliable regulator of fuel intake. • Overeating Cycle: Environmental and emotional cues can trigger an urge to eat (or to continue eating) whether there is a physical need for fuel or not. • Restrictive Eating Cycle: Diets can lead to preoccupation with food and feelings of deprivation that eventually lead to rebound overeating.
<p>When? When do I feel like eating?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When do you feel like eating? • How can you tell when you're hungry? • How could you distract yourself from eating until you get hungry? • What could you do to cope more effectively with your emotional triggers for eating, for example: manage stress better, find a hobby, treat yourself to a hot bath, ask for help around the house. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask yourself, "Am I hungry?" whenever you feel like eating. (Help patients develop an internalized mechanism of knowing when to eat.) • Hunger is a physical feeling; it is not the same thing as cravings, appetite or a desire to eat. • Getting too hungry can be a trigger for overeating. • Identify and reduce environmental cues for overeating, for example putting food out of sight, avoiding areas like the break room where food is likely to be found and ordering half-portions or sharing meals. • Identify and cope with emotional triggers for overeating such as boredom, stress, sadness, anger, loneliness, celebrating, or rewarding yourself. (Refer as needed).

Decision	Possible questions to start the conversation	Bite-sized Messages
<p>What? What do I eat?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you eat in a typical day? • Do you restrict yourself from eating certain foods then later give-in and overeat those foods? • Are there any areas of your diet that you think could be improved? • What specific change(s) would you like to make? • What health issues do you need to be aware of when choosing food (h/o high cholesterol, family h/o diabetes, BMI > 25, etc.) • What kinds of beverages do you drink? • What types of food do you want to eat when you're eating for emotional reasons? • What kinds of food could you keep on hand to eat when you are hungry? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Foods Fit: there are no “good” foods or “bad” foods. • Use balance, variety and moderation to guide your choices. www.mypyramid.gov provides a good general guide to healthful eating. Balance — provide your body with the necessary nutrients. Balance eating for nourishment with eating for enjoyment. Variety — eat a variety of foods from the different food groups and a variety of foods within each group. Moderation — consider overall dietary intake, not just the portion size of one particular item. • Ask yourself three questions when deciding what to eat: What do I want? What do I need? What do I have? • Make small, focused, incremental changes, for example, increasing fruits and vegetables, improving the quality of the fluids you drink, lower your saturated and trans fat intake and switching to healthier fats.
<p>How? How do I eat?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you eat while distracted, for example, watching TV, driving, working? • Do you think you eat fast? • Do you eat differently in private than you do in public? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat mindfully: stay aware of your body, the food and the ambience. • Minimize distraction: turn off the TV, eat while seated at a table. • Savor each bite, noticing the appearance, aromas and flavors. • Put your fork down between bites.
<p>How Much? How much do I eat?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you typically feel after eating? • How does it feel when you have eaten too much food? • What situations or emotions trigger overeating for you? • What could you do to address those triggers more effectively (for example, order less food, get up from the table, turn off the TV, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your stomach is only about the size of your fist so it only takes about a palm-full of food to fill it. • Eating too much can cause you to feel uncomfortable and sluggish. (Help them develop an internalized mechanism of portion control.) • When you eat more than your body needs, it has no choice but to store the extra fuel. • Practice ending your meal when you are satisfied instead of stuffed.
<p>Where? Where do I invest my energy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you spend (or invest) the fuel you consume? • Are you physically active? • Do you limit your “screen time?” • Do you exercise? What do you like to do? • What else do you do? For example, do you like to play with your children, do you have hobbies, do you volunteer, do you like to travel? • Is there anything else you would like to do that you are not doing now? What are your goals for your relationships, your career, your life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The food you consume provides the energy and nutrients to live, work, play and exercise. • When you eat more than you need, the excess fuel will be stored to be used for fuel later. • Increased physical activity in daily living can have a significant impact on your fuel balance. • Exercise will improve your health, increase your stamina and function, and make you feel better. • When you invest your energy in living a full, balanced life, you are less likely to use food to meet your needs, therefore breaking an Overeating and Restrictive Eating Cycle.