



*Eating  
to Live,  
Not Living  
to Eat*

Exploring the concept of Intuitive Eating and how its principles can change your life

By F. Adams

When you are not careful with your food intake and become enslaved to your temptations, food has a hold on you and you are not in control. But when you are on a diet, food continues to have that hold on you. You are enslaved to the dictates of that particular diet and much of your day is spent thinking about food, measuring food and talking about food.

Which was why I got excited when I heard about the concept of Intuitive Eating, which eschews the concept of dieting and instead calls for greater awareness of ourselves, our needs and our fulfillment.

When you turn to intuitive eating, you relinquish food's hold on you and put yourself in control of your food. But it goes even deeper, because you are not only putting yourself in control, you are putting Hashem in control. To me, letting go of every diet craze is essentially putting Hashem back into our food, as He should be in every aspect of our lives. He gave us a body; he gave us our intuition. Our body is incredibly complex and intelligent, and Hashem has created us in a way that enables us to stay healthy if we only listen to the cues of our body. As soon as I came across this concept, I knew I wanted to learn more about it.

I've been through my share of diets, as most women have, and I've been involved in more passionate, heated conversations about the topic than I'd care to count. It's gotten to a point that when the conversation steers that way I take it as my cue to make my exit. It's hard to hear yet another list of forbidden foods, yet another innovative food plan, knowing that the optimism permeating the voice that is extolling the virtues of this plan and the ten pounds she's already lost, will probably be deflated in a year or so, when she's back to square one. In a food obsessed society, diets have so pervaded our lives that they've become an obsession of their own.

### *The Principles*

So what exactly is Intuitive Eating?

It's essentially moving away from eating based on external rules, guidelines and societal expectations and toward listening to our internal rhythm and our bodies' cues.

"It's a way of eating that takes us back to how we used to eat," says Intuitive Eating Counselor Rena

Reiser, who lives in Israel and works with clients all over the world remotely. "We have been so inundated by diets and plans that have taken us away from our >>>

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The method was developed by two dietitians who found that they would put their clients on different meal plans and see success for a certain amount of time. Invariably, though, clients would eventually fall off the bandwagon and not maintain that success long term. This was discouraging because it turned all that they had learned in dietician school on its head, so they began doing research on why this was happening, before producing their seminal work that set the stage for Intuitive Eating as we know it.

Rena delineates the ten principal process toward becoming an intuitive eater, as set forward by Evelyn Tribole, MS RD, and Elyse Resch, MS RD, CEDRD, FADA, authors of *Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program that Works*.

### 1. Reject the Diet Mentality.

Get rid of the notion in your head that the next big diet is going to save you. Get rid of those diets that fed you false hopes of permanent weight loss, when the reality found you gaining all of your weight back and making you feel like a failure, once again.

### 2. Honor Your Hunger.

Hunger is your body's way of telling you to eat — nourish your body by tuning in to mild hunger cues and eating before you get ravenous. Waiting until you reach extreme hunger will cause you to overeat. Gentle hunger can be harder for people to identify,

so start to cue in to your hunger — and fullness — by taking time throughout the day to check in with your body, and by asking yourself how hungry or full you feel.

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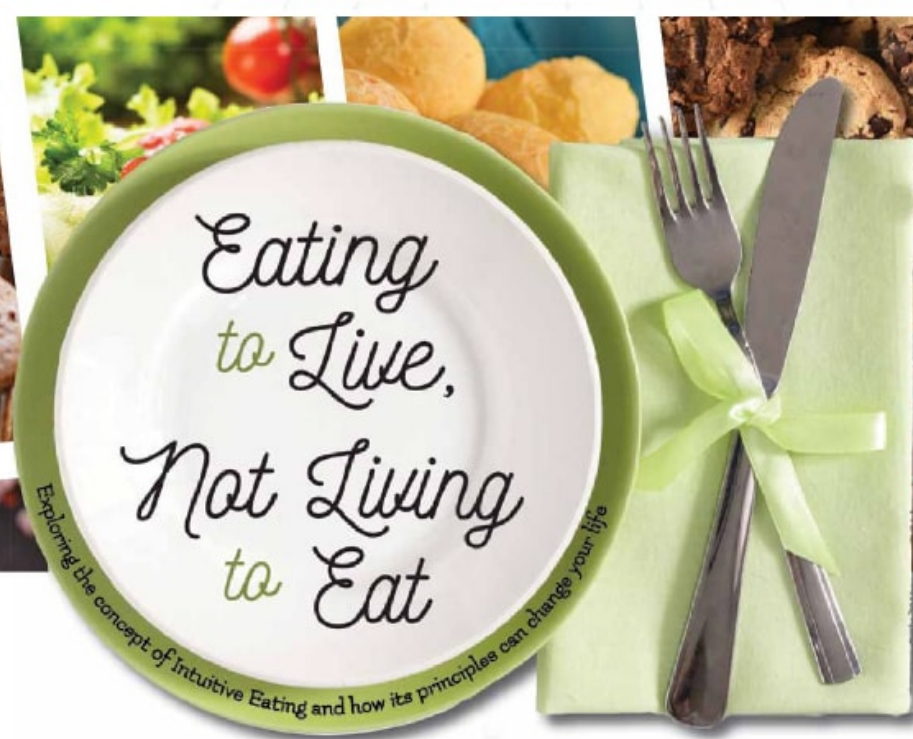


### 3. Make Peace with Food.

If you tell yourself that you can't or shouldn't have a particular food, it can lead to intense feelings of deprivation that build into uncontrollable cravings and, often, bingeing. When you finally “give-in” to your forbidden food, eating will be experienced with such intensity and overwhelming guilt. So make peace with food by giving yourself unconditional permission to eat with attunement.

### 4. Challenge the Food Police.

Banish the thoughts in your head that proclaim you “Good” when you eat only protein and fruits and bad because you consumed a donut at your grandmother's Chanukah party. The Food Police monitor the unreasonable rules that dieting >>>



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has created and shouts negative barbs, hopeless phrases, and guilt-provoking indictments. In order to begin eating intuitively, you need to get rid of the messages the Food Police has ingrained within you.

#### 5. Respect Your Fullness.

Just as you learn to tune in to — and honor — your hunger, start noticing your body's cues that tell you when you're full. Hunger and fullness encompass a wide spectrum, from stuffed to ravenous. Try to avoid each of those extremes. Instead, learn to identify when you're comfortably full — the point when you're no longer hungry and the food you're eating is losing its enjoyability. Do this by taking time during your meal to ask yourself how the food tastes and how full you feel.

#### 6. Discover the Satisfaction Factor.

In our fury to be thin, masquerading as a desire to be healthy, we often overlook the pleasure and satisfaction that can be found in the eating experience. Hashem gave us so many varieties of food for our pleasure, and when you eat what you really want, in an environment that is inviting and conducive, the pleasure you derive will be a powerful force in helping you feel satisfied and content. By providing this experience for yourself, you will find that it takes much less food to decide you've had "enough".

#### 7. Cope with Your Emotions Without Using Food.

Find ways to comfort, nurture, distract, and resolve your issues without using food. Anxiety, loneliness, boredom, anger are emotions we all experience throughout life. Each has its own trigger, and each has its own appeasement. Food won't fix any of these feelings. It may provide short term comfort or distraction, but it won't solve the problem. If anything, eating for an emotional hunger will only make you feel worse in the long run.

You'll ultimately have to deal with the source of the emotion, as well as the discomfort of overeating.

#### 8. Respect Your Body.

Accept and respect your body as it is now, whatever shape and size you are. It's hard to reject the diet mentality if you are unrealistic and overly critical about your body.

#### 9. Exercise--Feel the Difference.

If you're exercising just to burn calories, then it becomes a chore. Exercise is important for your health — and it does make you stronger — but if you don't enjoy it, you're less likely to do it regularly. Forget militant exercise. Just get active and feel the difference. Shift your focus to how it feels to move, rather than the calorie burning effect of exercise. If you focus on how you feel from working out, such as energized, invigorated, etc. it can make the difference between rolling out of bed for a brisk morning walk or hitting the snooze alarm. If when you wake up, your only goal is >>>

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to lose weight, it's usually not a motivating factor in that moment of time.

**10. Honor Your Health with Gentle Nutrition**

Make food choices that honor your health and taste buds while making you feel well. Remember that you don't have to eat a perfect diet to be healthy. You will not suddenly get a nutrient deficiency or gain weight from one snack, one meal, or one day of eating. It's what you eat consistently over time that matters – progress, not perfection is what counts.

"This list is not order specific; it's a process, not steps," says Rena. "I usually start my clients with hunger and fullness and then go to satisfaction, then challenge the food police, then

cope with your emotions, then respect your body, then exercise and nutrition. It really depends on the client. I have recordings that I have them listen to which gives the focus and then we work through the process over time."

*It's All About Perspective*

One of the beauties of the program is that it takes food away from being the central focus of our lives.

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**"INSTEAD WE CALL IT JOYFUL MOVEMENT, BECAUSE WE ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO FIND WHAT THEY FEEL**



**COMFORTABLE DOING AND THEN INCORPORATE THAT IN THEIR ROUTINE.**

"Because a lot of our work is centered around giving ourselves what we really need, we end up working on finding better boundaries in our life, with our spouse, children, work, parents, etc." says Rena. "We don't even talk about food until

the very end, where we introduce nutrition. This is because if I bring up nutrition advice before we explore the

whole relationship aspect, then any nutrition advice becomes just another diet. Here it's not about the food itself, but where it fits into our lives and how it affects us."

In intuitive eating, losing weight takes a back burner, whereas in dieting it's the central core. A diet is an external force: you get a certain food plan to follow, and in effect you're not feeling what is happening inside your body.

Intuitive Eating instead is about internal control, about asking oneself questions like: Is this going to energize me or make me crash? How will this food feel inside my body? Weight is not the consideration; it's not a conscious factor in our eating at all.

Diets fail for 95% of people. When you look at the percentages of people who gain their weight back within five years of starting a diet, and then within ten years, it's sad. Statistically, the more a person diets, the higher his weight climbs over time.

"Dieting focuses on telling us that when you go on this diet, you will be happy, your life will be amazing," says Rena. "There is this constant chasing of happiness, whereas here, we believe that we have happiness within us, we don't have to chase every diet and every look to find it, we just have to tune into the opportunities Hashem has given us."

When a person first starts intuitive eating they might feel like a kid in a candy store with so many different foods they were never "allowed" to eat, suddenly there for the taking. But the novelty quickly wears off, says Rena. As they learn to tune into their body's cues, they also learn what makes them feel good and what doesn't, and they begin to eat less nutritious foods as frequently on their own.

They will begin to answer their own questions: Am I hungry? Am I full? What is going to satisfy me today? Am I craving more protein? More carbohydrates? What is going to make me feel more satisfied?

Even exercise becomes more about listening to what your body is telling you, tuning into where you want to be and how you want to get there, rather than kill yourself at the gym for hours because that is what society says you need to do.

"We don't like to call it exercise. People have a resistance to exercise because of the negative associations it brings," says Rena. "Instead we call it joyful movement, because we

encourage people to find what they feel comfortable doing and then incorporate that in their routine. Whether it's a ten to twenty minute walk, dancing with the kids, taking the stairs instead of the elevator or incorporating stretches into your house cleaning, experience what strength feels like in your body and what movements get you there."

### *The Torah Hashkafah*

What about the Torah Hashkafah? How does that fit into Intuitive Eating?

Apparently, it does in a number of ways.

For one, there is this aspect of accepting and embracing the way Hashem created us.

"Not everyone is a size two," says Rena. "By fighting so hard to fit a certain image, we are negating the gifts that Hashem has given us. Instead, we should aim to nurture that body that He has granted us by listening to its cues and taking normal hishtadlus measures to feed it and care for it appropriately."

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Of course, eating for the purpose of chasing materialistic ideals is far more removed from the way a Yid should be living his life than eating based on what will give us the most strength and vitality.

Also, there can sometimes be confusion around the Torah hashkafah in regard to getting pleasure from food.

"On the one hand, we are told to get pleasure from food on Shabbos and Yom Tov, but on the other hand prishus and abstaining from the pleasure of the world is praised as a lofty goal," says Rena. "Intuitive Eating bridges that gap. It allows you to take pleasure without indulging. When Shabbos comes, you are not going to stuff your face with cookies because that is not Oneg. Rather, you will sit down in a relaxing environment, take something you really enjoy and eat it."

The key to avoiding over indulgence is to feel free to eat whenever you want with attunement. It sounds counterintuitive, but the reality is that when you are not supposed to have something it makes it so much harder to resist. Intuitive Eating takes away this constant obsession with what we can and cannot eat, how many pounds we lost this week, etc.

It essentially allows us to eat to live, not just live to eat. ●