THE HUNGER SCALE

INFORMATION BOOKLET

Improve your client's eating habits to ensure they are the healthiest they have ever been.

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INTRODUCTION

If you have lost touch with how physical hunger and fullness actually feel then this Hunger Scale can help you tune in back to your body and help you decide whether your desire to eat comes from real hunger or other reasons.

Use the information in this booklet, as well as the scale and diary to describe your level of hunger and recognise the best times to start and stop eating during your day.

HOW TO USE THE HUNGER SCALE

1. **Ask yourself, "Am I really physically hungry?"**

Use the Hunger Level Scale below to determine your level of hunger. Refer also to the table on the following page that describes what physical hunger typically feels like.

2. **Rate your hunger before you eat.**

If your hunger is a '3' on the scale then start eating. If you think you are on the scale of '4' wait half an hour and assess again. Stop eating when you reach '6'.

3. **Think about any other reasons you may want to eat.**

If you rate yourself 6 or above on the hunger scale, think about other reasons that may be triggering you to eat. These could be:

- Boredom
- Habit
- Places/Situations
- People
- Emotions

4. **Plan and take control**

If you suspect that your hunger is due to any psychological factors, instead of eating, try doing something else. Distract yourself with other activities such as walking, chatting to a friend, exercising, or meditating, which are just a few examples.

HUNGER SCALE TIPS

1. Eat regularly throughout the day

Remember to eat regular meals in order to avoid reaching '1' or '2' on the scale. This tends to happen if you ignore your hunger signals. It can also happen at busy points during the day where you skip your meals.

At the scale of '1' or '2' you can experience a loss of control, over eat, make poor food choices, and easily reach a '7' or more on the scale.

Here are a few tips to follow if you find yourself at scale '1' or '2':

Eat a little bit of something (e.g. a piece of fruit or a cracker) to get up to 3 on the scale.

Wait 10 to 15 minutes & see how your hunger level is now.

If you'd still rate your hunger as 3, then eat your planned meal. Eat normally until you reach 5 or 6 on the scale.

2. Keep hydrated

Remember to keep fluid levels up so that you can recognise and feel real hunger when it is not confused with thirst.

3. Personalise the scale

Your own experiences may differ from this and from those described on the hunger scale, so you could always experiment with developing your own scale in your own words to measure how it is in a way that makes sense for you.

4. Use the Hunger Awareness Diary

Use the diary attached below to make a note of thoughts or feelings linked to your eating and record how hungry you are before, during and after eating. Reflecting on these can be a powerful and effective way to find out more about what influences your own particular eating habits.

THE HUNGER LEVEL SCALE

1. Beyond hunger: you may have a headache and experience dizziness and a lack of concentration. Your body feels totally out of energy and you need to lie down.
2. You feel irritable and cranky, with little energy. You may also feel nauseous.
3. Your stomach feels empty and the urge to eat is strong.
4. You start to think about food. Your body is giving you the signal that you might want to eat.
5. Your body has had enough food to keep going and is physically and psychologically just starting to feel satisfied.
6. You are fully satisfied and full up.
7. You are feeling past the point of satisfaction, yet you can still find room for a little more. Your body might say no but your mind says yes, so you take a few more bites.
8. Your stomach is starting to really ache. You probably know you shouldn't have had more, but it tasted so good.
9. You now feel really uncomfortable, heavy, tired and bloated.
10. Beyond full: this is a typical Christmas Day sort of feeling — you are physically miserable, don't want to or can't move, and feel like you never want to look at food again. Not a good point to reach!

PHYSICAL HUNGER	PSYCHOLOGICAL HUNGER
Increases gradually	Makes a sudden appearance
An apple would do	You want a certain type of food, tends not to be an apple
Can wait for food ("I need to have something to eat soon")	Want food now; sense of urgency, panic
A response to your body's definite need (i.e. rumbling tummy)	In response to a feeling; upset, bored, tired etc.
A deliberate choice eaten with awareness	Impulsive choice, eaten quickly. You may not even taste the food
Sense of satisfaction after eating	You still want more, or a different type of food e.g. sweet after salty
No guilt	Lots of guilt and promises about next time

THE HUNGER LEVEL DIARY

TIME	BEFORE EATING			FOOD EATEN	AFTER EATING	
	Where are you eating? Who are you eating with?	*Thoughts and feelings before you eat*	*Hunger before eating (scale 1-10)*		*Hunger/fullness after eating (1-10)*	*Do you feel satisfied? If not, what do you think would have satisfied you?*

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Hunger Scale teaches you to listen to your body. Here are some ideas on how to become more mindful around meal times, which in turn will help you to know when to start and stop eating. With practice you will be able to manage your hunger, feel more in control of your eating habits, and enjoy your meals mindfully.

Before you eat

Concentrate your attention on your stomach and give yourself a number on the Hunger Scale. You should naturally feel hunger (3 on the scale) around every 3-5 hours after your last meal.

If your hunger is not coming your stomach area, you are probably feeling hunger due to an emotional state or out of habit, so try to find an alternative way to comfort yourself rather than eating.

During a meal

Eat slowly and mindfully to allow yourself to feel how full you are getting. Listen for the body when it tells you that you are no longer hungry. Look out for the signals telling you that you're comfortably full but try not to reach the point of feeling stuffed.

Stop when you're halfway through your meal to check your fullness, if you are still feeling hunger, then continue eating another half of your meal. Stop again and reassess. This method is a good way to make sure you don't overeat.

Finishing a meal

Stop eating when you are around '5 'or '6' on the scale. Stopping at a higher number or convincing yourself that you need to leave a completely clean plate means you have probably taken in more food than your body needs.

References:

https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health

You Count, Calories Don't, Ominchanski, L. (1992)