CONSUMED

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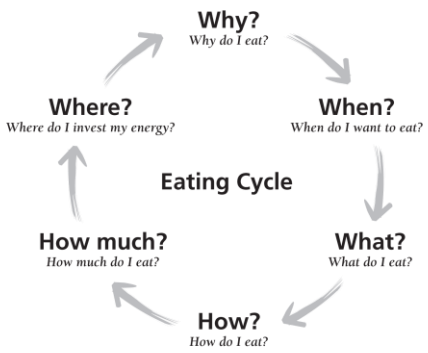
It's Not Just *What* You Eat, But *Why*

By Michelle May, M.D.

Many people have the mistaken belief that their weight problems are caused by what and how much they eat. Those are important but they only tell part of the story. In fact, what you eat and how much you eat are strongly affected by *why* you're eating in the first place.

The Am I Hungry?® Eating Cycle will help you see how each decision you make can affect your other choices.



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As you review the Eating Cycle, ask yourself the following questions to help you recognize and better understand how you make conscious or subconscious decisions about your eating. More importantly, use these questions to discover possible steps you can take to become more mindful about your decisions.

Why? Why do I eat?

- Why do I think I eat?
- Am I aware of any situations or emotions that trigger me to want to eat when I'm not hungry? Examples: Mealtimes, social events, certain people, stress, boredom, buffets, getting ready to start a diet…
- Have I tried a lot of diets? What happened? How did they work for me long term? Why?

When? When do I feel like eating?

- How often do I feel like eating?
- How do I know if I'm hungry?
- How could I redirect my attention away from food until I'm hungry?
- What could I do to cope better with my emotional triggers for eating? Examples: Manage stress better; tell someone how I really feel; find a hobby; treat myself to a hot bath; ask for more help around the house…

What? What do I eat?

- What do I eat in a typical day? Would a food diary for a few days help?
- Do I restrict myself from eating certain foods—then later give-in and overeat those foods?
- What health issues do I need to be aware of when deciding what to eat? Examples: High blood pressure, high cholesterol, family history of diabetes.
- What kind of beverages do I drink?
- What types of foods do I feel like eating when I'm eating for emotional reasons? Why?
- Are there any areas of my diet that I could improve right now?
- What specific change would I like to make at this time?
- What kind of foods could I keep on hand to eat when I'm hungry?

How? How do I eat?

- Do I eat while I'm distracted? Examples: Watching T.V.; reading; driving; working; talking…
- Do I eat fast?
- Do I really taste my food?
- Do I eat differently in private than I do in public?

How Much? How much do I eat?

- How do I typically feel when I'm done eating? Do I like that feeling?
- Do I usually clean my plate?
- If I'm not hungry when I start eating, how do I know when to stop?
- What situations or emotions trigger me to overeat?
- What could I do to address those triggers more effectively? Examples: Order less food; ask for a to-go container; get up from the table; turn off the TV; say "no" to food pushers…

Where? Where do I invest the fuel I eat?

- Am I physically active?
- Do I watch too much TV or spend too much free time in front of computer?
- Do I exercise? What do I like to do?
- What else do I do with my energy? Examples: Play with my children; work on my hobbies; volunteer; travel; spend time with friends…
- Is there anything else I'd like to do with my energy that I'm not doing now? What are my goals for my relationships, my career, and my life?

The first step to changing the way you eat is awareness. As you become more mindful of each decision point in your Eating Cycle, you'll discover small changes that can make a big difference in why, when, what, how, and how much you eat and where you invest your energy.

Michelle May, M.D. is a recovered yoyo dieter and the award-winning author of *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat: How to Break Your Eat-Repent-Repeat Cycle.* Additional articles and resources: **www.AmIHungry.com**.

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