



GDC Coaching

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What to Eat: Three Questions to Ask Yourself

By Michelle May, M.D.

We are bombarded with conflicting messages about what to eat—often side by side on the same magazine cover. These confusing messages create internal conflict when what you *want* to eat must face off with what you *should* eat according to the latest expert.

Ironically, the definition of "good" and "bad" foods changes every few years so people feel confused and overwhelmed by all the conflicting and often arbitrary messages about what they're supposed to eat.

However it is possible to strike a balance between eating for nourishment and eating for enjoyment. But how do you drown out all the noise and find that balance when deciding what to eat?

Start by asking yourself three simple questions when you're hungry: "What do I want to eat?" "What do I need to eat?" and "What do I have to eat?"

What Do I Want to Eat?

The first question, "What do I want to eat?" may come as a surprise. But what happens when you try to avoid food you really want—like those Girl Scout Cookies that were delivered *after* you started your new low-carb diet?

First you check the label and confirm that they're off limits so you put them in the freezer. Two days later they whisper to you from their hiding place, "Pssst. We're in here!" You manage to resist them, instead munching on some olives, four cubes of cheese, a hunk of leftover meatloaf with a side of celery sticks, two pieces of low-carb toast—and yet you still don't feel satisfied.

"Hey! We're in here and we taste great frozen!" You finally give in to your urge and have two cookies. Blew it again! Might as

well eat the whole sleeve and start over tomorrow. Sound familiar?

Thinking about what you really want to eat without judging yourself will keep you from feeling deprived and out of control when you choose to eat certain foods.

You might be worried that if you ask yourself what you're really hungry for, you'll always choose foods you "shouldn't." At first this might seem true since cravings tend to get stronger when you try to ignore them for too long. However, once you let go of the guilt about eating certain foods, they lose their power over you.



Learn to trust your body wisdom and you'll soon discover that you want to eat a variety of foods to feel healthy and satisfied.

What Do I Need to Eat?

While food decisions aren't "good" or "bad," clearly some foods offer more nutritional benefits than others. As you consider what food to choose, ask yourself, "What does my body need?" Keep in mind the principles of variety, balance, and

moderation when deciding. Consider nutrition information, your personal health issues, family history, what else you will be eating/doing that day, and how your body responds to certain foods.

Enjoy your healthy choices by focusing on fresh foods, appealing combinations, new flavors, and interesting recipes.

What Do I Have to Eat?

The key to the final question, "What do I have to eat?" is planning. If you feel hungry and the only thing available is a vending machine, you're likely to choose a snack food that may not be very healthy, may not taste very good, and may not really be what you were hungry for anyway.

Instead, strive to have a variety of foods available that are healthful and that you enjoy when you're hungry, but won't be calling out to you from their storage place saying, "Come eat me!"

Of course, you're not always in control of which foods are available. At a restaurant, office potluck, or friend's house, simply see what's available and ask yourself, "Is there a healthy choice that will meet my needs without feeling deprived?" For example, could you be happy with frozen yogurt instead of ice cream this time? If the answer is no, have the ice cream!

Matching the food you choose to what you're really hungry for and what your body needs leads to greater satisfaction and more enjoyment—usually with less food.

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*.

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