Empower yourself by eating what YOU want
- how to develop a healthy relationship with food

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Diet’s don’t Work – Develop a Healthy Relationship with Food

Diets don’t work. As soon as we follow some sort of eating plan or diet, we are allowing someone else to control what we eat. Eating gives us life, it is as important as breathing. It should not be a guilt-invoked struggle. It is a natural function and part of who we are. We should love and trust ourselves enough to eat what we want to eat, when we want and know we are making the right choice for ourselves. This is exactly what Natural Eating involves and is made up of the following four principles:

● Eat when you are hungry
● Eat what you want
● Stop when you are satisfied
● Move onto another activity once you have finished eating

Eat When you are Hungry

Most people tend to eat at certain times of the day and not when they are actually hungry, such as breakfast at 7.00am, lunch at 12.30pm and dinner at 6.30pm. This is not necessarily when we are hungry but a habit that we have got into which fits in with our lives. This generally means we have 5 to 6 hour gaps without eating. By doing this we allow our metabolism to slow down. Because our body has to wait so long for food, it stores any that it receives and burns it slowly to enable our body and brain to function correctly. However, if we actually listen to our body most people will be hungry every 2 to 3 hours. So instead of 3 large meals you end up having 6 to 7 smaller portions throughout the day, which speeds up your metabolism, ensures your blood sugar levels are balanced and means you are easily satisfied.

Eating what you want!

Eating what you want is the most crucial step of natural eating. Your body wants different foods for different reasons and it knows what it wants. If you want a treat food such as chocolate and you have an apple instead, you may have physically filled the gap with the apple, but emotionally you are not satisfied. And 9 times out of 10 most of us will end up eating the chocolate anyway. Allow yourself to have the treats.
Most of us binge eat because we tell ourselves it is not OK to eat the treats. Once we allow ourselves to have them we actually don't want them so much because we know we can have them when we want them and we enjoy the way our body feels when we eat in a healthy and balanced way.

**Stopping when you are Satisfied**
The third principle of Natural Eating is to stop when you are satisfied. Most people may think they stop when they have had enough, but in reality they probably stop when the plate is empty! Unfortunately the plate often has far too much on it to start with, which means they are overeating. This is often something conditioned in us as children. We were told to eat everything on our plates because of the starving children in Africa. How making ourselves uncomfortable and over weight is going to help people thousands of miles away is beyond me, but this is a common story in many families. There is a definitive feeling in our stomachs when we are satisfied, but most of us eat on autopilot and are not tuned into our body, so therefore miss the signal. In the meantime, our stomach stretches and we get used to eating a certain amount, so we will always overeat.

**Moving onto something else after Eating**
The final principle of Natural Eating is to move onto another activity when we have finished eating. This is a completely normal thing to do, but for a lot of us we tend to pick at food even when we have had enough simply because it is there, or we don't have something meaningful to look forward to once we have finished eating. By tidying the food and dishes away straight away after eating it signals the end of the meal and we can then happily carry on with something else.

Natural Eating is suitable for anyone who would like to develop a healthy relationship with food. You will lose weight gradually and permanently, gain peace of mind around food and body image, release the guilt and improve your total health and well being. This is simply because it is the way our body was designed to eat. Over the years we have simply lost sight of this due to outside influences, our everyday busy lives and immense peer and media pressure to conform to dieting.
How do I know when I am hungry?
Generally people who are over weight or have issues with food, have lost the ability to know when they are actually hungry. These people tend to eat on auto pilot simply because that is the way they have been taught to eat. It has become a habit and it fits in with their busy lives. They eat at certain times of the day, generally breakfast, lunch and dinner. Unfortunately this means that they are having huge gaps in between meals of say 5 – 6 hours. Over time our body remembers this and knows it will not get food for a long time, so it slows everything down, basically storing the fat so the food will last until more is provided. Effectively by doing this we are creating a slow metabolism.

Once we actually start listening to our body we find that we are hungry every 2 to 3 hours and eat accordingly. Again our body remembers this and works through the food quickly making room for the next meal and therefore creating a faster metabolism. Some people think metabolism is hereditary or can only be increased by exercise. These can be contributory factors but to really speed up your metabolism you need to eat frequently.

Often we are just too busy to listen to our bodies and we miss the signals. When this happens, you may find you don’t feel hungry or are just past it. For instance when you go out for dinner and have slow service, sometimes by the time the meal comes you don’t actually feel like it. This is an example of your metabolism slowing down.

It is therefore really important to tune into your body so you know when you are beginning to get hungry. If you wait until you are starving you are likely to over-eat or make an inappropriate choice at that time.

By “Eating Naturally” we learn to tune back into our body, so we know when we are hungry. There is a definitive feeling in our stomach when we are hungry which to me feels like butterflies. Once this feeling comes, you act on it by selecting something to eat that you really want and feel like at that time.
Once you get used to listening for and feeling the signals and act on them by eating, you will start to increase your metabolism and find you are hungrier more often. Accordingly, you will then be satisfied with smaller portions than you are used to. You won’t need big meals any longer, as you are eating much more frequently and not allowing yourself to get over hungry.

Knowing when we are hungry is a principle of “Natural Eating” and a key to being healthy. So, start tuning in to yourself so you know when you are hungry!

"Habit is either the best of servants or the worst of masters."

- Nathaniel Emmons
Eating what you want is the key to losing weight!
How many people do you know who won’t have treats like chocolate, biscuits, ice cream or fresh Sunday bread in the house, because they know that once they start they will eat the whole lot?

The reason they want to eat the whole lot is because they treat these types of foods as “naughty” or “forbidden”. They feel they are not allowed them and feel guilty or bad if they eat them. So once they start they have to eat the whole lot to get rid of them so they can then be “good” or start their diet (again) tomorrow!

“Eating Naturally” teaches you to “allow” yourself to eat these foods. Ironically once you truly allow yourself to eat your favourite treats you won’t want to eat them uncontrollably. You know they are there when you want them and you will be satisfied with a small portion, as they are no longer forbidden.

Our body wants different types of foods for various reasons, i.e. salty, sweet, hot, cold, savoury or sour. It is crucial to go with your initial instinct when deciding what you want to eat. If you open the pantry doors, see a packet of chips and think “that’s what I feel like”, then you need to have it. Often a little voice on your shoulder will say, “ah but they are not healthy, you will put on weight, have an apple instead”. The problem is if you have the apple when you really wanted the chips, 9 times out of 10 you will go back and eat the chips anyway! This is because even though the apple may satisfy your hunger physically it doesn’t satisfy you emotionally as you are depriving yourself of what you truly want.

Natural Eating will teach you to trust yourself to make the right choices for you and will eliminate the guilt that surrounds treat foods. You will find you won’t want to eat the unhealthy foods uncontrollably because you enjoy how you feel when eating in a balanced and healthy way, such as:
• Lots of energy
• Not feeling overfull and heavy
• Wanting to exercise
• Feeling more vital
• Loss of excess weight
• Maintaining your natural weight
• Being able to participate in anything you want to

This is where “dieting” is such a catch 22! We are saying to ourselves, you are not allowed this and that, and only so much of the other that we end up being absolutely miserable because we are depriving ourselves. We can only sustain that for so long before we lose it completely by bingeing or gradually start to put the weight back on because we can’t maintain such a rigid regime forever.

Natural Eating empowers you to make the right choices for you, because you are the only one who knows what you want both physically and emotionally.

So enjoy your favourite foods! You will be satisfied sooner and stop eating earlier. You will no longer “crave” unhealthy foods, so won’t over-indulge. Therefore you will be eating in a healthy and balanced way.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

- Charles Darwin
How do I know when to stop?

Often people who are unhealthy or have food related issues don’t necessarily eat unhealthy food. What tends to happen is that they are eating far too much at one time. This is often because they have got into the habit of eating everything on their plate, so they have lost the ability to know when they are actually satisfied.

How many of us were not allowed to leave the table until we had finished everything on our plates, (especially the vegetables, generally the green mushy ones), because the poor starving children in Africa would die if we didn’t? It was a waste to leave anything; our parents couldn’t afford to throw food away! Unfortunately this didn’t take into account our personal preferences for food and how much we could physically fit in our stomachs without being over full. So now there are generations of people who have to eat everything on their plates, no matter how much is served up because they have been doing it all their lives.

Often, we don’t even feel uncomfortable anymore; we just get used to the way our stomach feels as we have always eaten that much. But we can definitely tell by our body shape and by how much we weigh that we are eating too much, even though it may be mostly healthy choices.

The third principle of Natural Eating is to “Stop when you are satisfied, but not over full”. There is a definite feeling in your stomach when you are comfortable, but most of us just eat way past it because again we are on autopilot to finish everything in front of us. A suggestion to overcome this is to try serving yourself only half to three-quarters of your normal size portion. As you are eating it, focus on the food, savour and enjoy it. Keep asking yourself, “Have I had enough?” Practice listening to your body so you can feel when you are satisfied. You can always go and get yourself some more if you still feel hungry, but you can’t put it back if you’ve over-eaten. Tell yourself you can have something else to eat when you are hungry again.

If you don’t like to waste food, either cook less than normal or put the left overs in the fridge for later.
Another way to be able to stop when you are satisfied is to eat what you want. If you eat what you truly want all the time you are far more easily satisfied. If you eat something you feel you “should” eat instead, you will not be satisfied and will end up over eating.

Here are some tips to enable you to embrace “Natural Eating” over the holidays:

- Eat little bits of your favourite treats throughout the day.
- You don’t have to try everything at once, tell yourself you can eat again later when you get hungry again.
- Keep listening to your body so you can stop before you get over full.
- If possible, serve up your own meals so you don’t feel obligated to eat everything your host has given you.
- If you are not hungry when offered something to eat, politely ask if you can have it a bit later or take it with you. Most people will not be offended by this!
- Remember how you feel when you have over-eaten in the past, the physical feelings of being over full and the guilt you then carry. There is no need you can still enjoy all your favourite foods. Listen to your body. You are the only person who can make the appropriate choices for you.
- Focus on the joy of the occasion and being with family and friends, it doesn’t have to be all about the food. Get out and play with the children or enjoy family walks and activities.

"Strength is the ability to break a chocolate bar into four pieces with your bare hands - and then eat just one of those pieces."

- Judith Viorst
Find something more compelling than food to focus on!

When I was recovering from my food and weight related issues, I discovered that food was the only way I gave myself pleasure. Food was my joy and my cuddles and the only thing I had to look forward to. I had lost the ability to gain pleasure in other ways. I used food for comfort when I was angry, sad, lonely, bored, disappointed or just to get through the day. Unfortunately although I may have gained some relief for a short period, (while I was actually eating), I then had to deal with the despair, anger and disappointment of having eaten too much, ultimately leading to the negative cycle of gaining and losing weight.

The fourth principle of Natural Eating is “Moving onto another activity after eating”. This means we find other things in our lives that give us pleasure that we can look forward to after we have finished eating. This will enable us to have another focus, so food is not the most important thing to us. Accordingly, once we are satisfied with what we have had to eat, we can then move onto something else easily and effortlessly. When you have had enough, tell yourself you are allowed to eat again when you are hungry. This way you are telling yourself it is OK to stop. You are not depriving yourself as you are giving yourself permission to eat again later. Then clear the table and put everything away. This signifies the end of the meal and time to do something else and ensures you don’t continue to pick at uneaten food simply because it is still available.

So what is it that you love doing? It may be a hobby such as painting, knitting, music, gardening, writing or reading. Or it could be some form of exercise or sport. It may be catching up with friends, going to the movies, bowling or simply playing with your children. The important thing is to find something you really love, so it will be more tempting than food. That way it is easier to stop eating because you know you have something else to look forward to.

Personally I enjoy reading, writing, walking, playing with my children, going to the movies and catching up with friends and family.
However, my main focus now is self-improvement through Personal Development. Setting goals, creating my dream life, learning about myself, growing internally, reading motivational stories and attending seminars. This has increased my confidence and self esteem and gives me things to look forward to on a daily basis. Personal Development is a key element of my Natural Eating Courses. Through Natural Eating you learn the process of how to listen to your body and give it what it wants and needs. Through Personal Development you gain confidence, faith, trust and belief that you are the right person to make the appropriate choices for yourself not only to do with food, but in all areas of your life.

"The road to happiness lies in two simple principles: find what it is that interests you and that you can do well, and when you find it put your whole soul into it - every bit of energy and ambition and natural ability you have.”

- John D. Rockefeller III

Accordingly, find something you love doing and do it as often as you can. This will start to take the focus away from food and health related issues.
Through Natural Eating, weight loss is gradual, but permanent!
People are always looking for ways to lose weight fast and that is why it never lasts long term. Yes you can lose weight quickly on all number of diets, eating plans and exercise programmes. However I can guarantee it will come back again and generally more than you had to start with!

Diets don’t work for a number of reasons:

1. They are negative. Diets are all about what you can’t have and tend to be based on depriving yourself of all your favourite foods.
2. Diets are controlling. Someone else is telling you what to eat, when to eat it and how to eat.
3. Diets require willpower. We have to fight with ourselves to stay on a diet simply because it is not giving us what we need both physically and emotionally.
4. Diets are all consuming; they start to affect all areas of your life from your mood to your relationships. Often everything revolves around food.
5. Diets are dangerous and can lead to Eating Disorders.

By eating naturally you are giving your body what it wants all the time, both physically and emotionally. You notice when you’re hungry, you eat what you want at that time, you stop when you’re satisfied and get on with something else. You will lose the weight gradually as your body adjusts to your new pattern of eating. Eventually it will settle at a weight that is comfortable for you that you won’t have to fight to maintain, as this is your “set-point”. We all have a “set-point” weight just like we have a pre-determined eye colour, hair colour, hand size and height. No amount of dieting will allow us to drop below this weight long term. How many people do you know who are always trying to lose just 5 more pounds?

Natural Eating is a gradual positive process which is in tune with your wants and needs. It is all about how you eat, not what you eat. It empowers you to achieve and maintain your natural weight without dieting and while enjoying all your favourite foods.
"The important thing is this: To be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become."

- Charles DuBois

Eating naturally does not mean eating without limits or control. However unlike a diet, the limits and control come from within. Don’t be in a rush, love and trust yourself enough to make positive choices and enjoy the long-term benefits of eating naturally.
Negative Eating habits can be changed easily if your reason is strong enough!

Before any change in eating habits is possible, you must accept responsibility for where you are today. This is not beating yourself up or berating yourself. It is simply accepting that circumstances and the choices you have made in the past have resulted in the eating habits you now have.

Start by loving and accepting yourself just as you are. You are a unique wonderful person. Respect yourself and all you have achieved in your life. Is there a defining moment in your life when you started to put on weight? Come to terms with it. Accept it, forgive yourself and move on. Acknowledge that overeating is not a positive influence in your life. Draw a line in the sand and put all your negative eating habits behind you. It doesn’t matter what has happened in the past. It is no-one’s fault, release the guilt, shame and blame.

The easiest way to do all this is to find a very powerful reason to make you want to change. This reason needs to be so powerful that you will remain completely focussed on your goal no matter what. For some of you, the reason may simply be that you are just sick to death of dieting, losing weight quickly and then watching as the weight just gradually creeps its way back on over time. For others it may be that you have serious health problems and that if you don’t change your habits you may in fact die!

Work out what that reason is and decide that this is where you start. There is no looking back just continuous little action steps until you have embraced natural eating. Ensure you write the reason down and read your statement at least morning and night so you are really starting to focus on why you want to change your negative habits. A great deal of research shows that it takes at least 30 days of continuous action until something becomes a habit. So it is imperative to read your card every day for 30 days so your brain realises that this is something that you are really serious about. Then it will help you find ways to achieve your goal.
Once you genuinely believe that you want to change your eating habits for good, you can then start to put the principles of natural eating into practice. Again you will have to keep doing each of them every day for at least 30 days until they become instinctive and you don’t even think about them.

I can guarantee for a lot of you that you presently eat on auto-pilot. You may not even be hungry or you may eat far too much, but you don’t even know you’re doing it because for whatever reason you have just got into negative eating habits, without even knowing it. When I started Natural Eating, I had to work really hard to follow the 4 main principles because it was not natural to me. But over time, with practice and determination to achieve my health goals, they have now become instinctive and I don’t even think about eating. I just give my body what it wants when it’s hungry, stop when I’m satisfied and then move onto something else.

So go for it. Work out what your reason is to eliminate all your negative eating habits, read your statement every day, and then embrace natural eating. You can do it; you just have to decide you want to!

"Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you’ll start having positive results."

- Willie Nelson
Tips on Embracing Natural Eating – Start by sitting down when you eat!
Generally people have got into all sorts of habits when they eat, however not many people tend to sit down at the table with their family and actually concentrate solely on the meal and enjoying the food. Due to time constraints, family commitments and stressful lives we tend to eat:

- In front of the TV
- On the run
- In the car
- Standing in front of the refrigerator
- Off our children’s plates as we clear them away
- At the kitchen bench while preparing dinner
- In business meetings
- At our computers
- While watching our children at sport etc
- And on and on

By concentrating on these other things and not the actual meal itself we are missing out on the joy of eating and often don’t even know what we have just eaten or more importantly, how much we have eaten. We tend to eat on auto-pilot and often eat way past satisfaction simply because we weren’t concentrating. If you give yourself the chance to sit down at the table in a calm environment, you can then begin to savour, smell, enjoy and actually taste the food. Accordingly, you will be able to listen to your body and know when it is satisfied and when it is time to stop eating.

What tends to happen is that we end up eating far too much. This is because if we are simply picking at food or eating on the run, we are not physically serving up an actual portion, so we have no idea how much we have had. By doing this it is very difficult to stop before we get over-full. Similarly if we are eating in front of the TV or computer we concentrate on the programme and not how our body is feeling. Again we miss the inner cue that tells us when to stop.
In addition, if we have not thought in advance about what we want to eat and are simply picking, it is very easy to make inappropriate choices. This is often because we are too tired, have allowed ourselves to get too hungry, or haven’t allowed ourselves enough time to prepare a nutritious meal.

Meal times are also a wonderful opportunity to interact with family members and friends. You can catch up on what has been happening throughout the day, start creating family traditions around mealtimes and have a set family time each day.

"Take good care of your body; it’s the only place you have to live."

Jim Rohn

So, no matter how you eat at present, at least sit down to eat. This will give you the chance to stop and think about what you are eating and hopefully enable you to hear when your body is telling you to stop.
Tips on Embracing Natural Eating – Start Feeling Good about Food

I find that in general, people who are trying to lose weight talk about being "good" or "bad" in relation to food. They often feel guilty because they think they have eaten something "naughty" which ultimately leads them to binge on what they perceive as unhealthy food.

They have simply developed a negative association with food. This is hardly surprising, considering the "normal" way that people think they should lose weight is by dieting and deprivation. This is drummed into us in the media, by celebrities, our parents, our peers, and with the thousands of diets available. Unfortunately, this approach does not teach us to trust ourselves and listen to our own bodies so we can make positive and appropriate choices with regard to our own health. We think we have to follow strict eating plans and can't have any treats. If we do we have been "bad".

This is why it doesn't work. No one likes to be told they can't have or do something. Who can relate to children who won't take no for an answer and will simply nag and nag until we finally say yes just to shut them up? We all respond best to positive associations, encouragement and support. In this way we are empowered to make appropriate decisions for ourselves.

There is no such thing as "bad" food. Sure, different foods have a higher fat, sugar or calorie content, but it's only bad for you if you eat it all the time in large quantities. We deserve to enjoy our food and have treats. Food should be used to fuel our bodies but we should gain pleasure from it as well whether it is healthy or unhealthy.

If you are not used to eating healthy foods, you can learn to enjoy how you feel when you are not overfull or too heavy and have lots of energy. Similarly, if you're not used to treating yourself to your favourite foods, you can learn how it feels to just try a little bit, how great it feels to "let go" and the satisfaction of being able to stop, knowing you can have some again later on.
“There is no passion to be found playing small - in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.”

- Nelson Mandela

Natural Eating empowers you to experiment with food, find out what gives you pleasure and enables you to think positively about food. In this way you will feel more in control and start to enjoy eating and how your body feels when you give it what it wants and needs.
**Tips on Embracing Natural Eating – Don’t Focus on the Weight-loss!**

People often don’t succeed in losing weight permanently because they want it to happen yesterday. To keep weight off indefinitely we need to let our body do it naturally. If we actually listen to our body and give it what it wants, when it needs it, it will respond positively.

Natural Eating enables us to really listen to our body and teaches us that our body has a set point that is genetically determined. No amount of dieting will allow you to remain under your set point forever.

You have to acknowledge that the weight loss will be gradual as your body gets used to the changes you are making. Therefore, to remain focused and trust that you are the right person to make choices with regard to nourishing yourself, it is imperative you concentrate on the benefits of Natural Eating and not how much weight you are losing. Remember, once you’ve turned those negative-eating habits into positive habits, the weight loss will be permanent. You will no longer have to fight to maintain your weight on a daily basis.

Two key benefits of Natural Eating are as follows:

**You will be eating in a balanced and healthy way**

Once you listen to your body and eat when it is hungry, you will find you are eating healthily the majority of the time. You will be eating more regularly and have smaller portion sizes, more frequently throughout the day.

Often people pick up on the sensationalism of “natural eating” and think they will be totally out of control if they are allowed to eat whatever they want whenever they want it. All they’ll want to eat is high fat, high sugar, and high caloric foods. This is generally only our perception. We imagine we don’t have control because we haven’t allowed ourselves to try it previously.
The difference with natural eating is that by “telling yourself” that you can have a certain type of food, ie. chocolate, whenever you want it, you actually won’t want it most of the time. By allowing yourself to have it, the charge around that food is gone and when you do actually feel like some, you will be more than satisfied with a small portion. This is also because you know that if you want some more later you are allowed it. Therefore you are not depriving yourself and never allowing yourself to get really hungry or ravenous.

**You will be eating from true preference, rather than a reaction to rules**

Once you have allowed yourself the choice then you will eat what your body wants, not what you should have. How often do we change our mind on what we were going to eat because we suddenly felt guilty when we realised we were selecting a so-called “unhealthy” item? The problem is, if we change our mind and eat something else we may be satisfied physically but we won’t be satisfied emotionally. I can guarantee you that nine times out of ten we will go back and get the original item anyway. It is therefore much more sensible to just have what you feel like. Your body knows what it wants. By eating what you want you will be easily satisfied and not over-indulge.

"The first step toward change is acceptance.

*Once you accept yourself, you open the door to change.*

*That's all you have to do.*

*Change is not something you do, it's something you allow."

- Will Garcia

Simply listen to your body and give it what it wants when it is hungry.
I trust you have enjoyed these articles on how to develop a healthy relationship with food. I have also written a new e-book comprising my experiences of eating naturally since 1996 and teaching others since 2009. This is now available on Amazon Kindle here.

If you would like to connect with me on Facebook, please select this link.

For more information on “Natural Eating” or a complimentary no obligation consultation, either in person or via SKYPE or telephone, please contact me on catrina@nourishnnurture.co.nz

All the very best

Kind regards Catrina

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