
A guide to
Peaceful Eating



The body, mind and spirit guide to
making peace with your body and food

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The guide to Peaceful Eating is just that – a guide to support you in changing your relationship with your body and food, so that you feel relaxed in any eating situation, always have permission to eat what you want, and learn to live your life in a healthier, more empowered way.

Looking back on the journey of my own recovery from binge eating disorder and bulimia, I realise that I had been approaching the issue from three angles: those of the body, mind and spirit. It was only when all three of these areas were being addressed that I saw fundamental change. When I was working only with the mind, there was some change and many, many setbacks. When I worked with the body and mind, there were greater improvements, but I couldn't say I had reached a state of peace. It was only after I had been developing my spiritual life for a while, that I experienced HUGE change, a fundamental shift that seems to me now to be unshakeable.

I have separated this guide into these three areas because to me it's helpful to see them that way. This doesn't mean that one needs to come before another – they all work together! But it is important to move at a pace that isn't a shock to the system (like going on a diet!), though it needs to take you out of your comfort zone. Start with the things you think you'll find easier, and be willing to tolerate more discomfort as you go. The magic happens in the zone of discomfort!

BODY

1. Eat when you're hungry

Now I know this probably sounds obvious to you – I mean, you feed a baby when it's hungry, don't you? My husband eats when he's hungry. Why do we think it's bad to eat when we're hungry? I'll tell you why; it's because we've come to believe through the dieting culture, that we'll lose weight when we're hungry. Hunger is good, is the espoused wisdom. 'Suffer to be beautiful' my mother used to tell me (and her mother told her).

I don't mean to insult your intelligence, but here's the thing. Hunger is there to let us know that our bodies need fuel! When we consistently ignore those signals, it sends the body into survival mode. Our brains haven't evolved to take into account the availability of high calorie foods 24/7. When we consistently don't eat when we're hungry, our reptilian brains (the first but least evolved part) go into fight or flight survival mode. This means our metabolism drops to conserve energy – and sends a message to *STORE FAT – THIS IS A FAMINE!*

So please, **EAT WHEN YOU'RE HUNGRY!** By consistently eating when you're actually physically hungry, your body will learn to trust you again, and feel safe to release any stored weight.

2. Stop when you're physically satisfied

This is a tricky one for us, and it has taken me some time to get the hang of it. I didn't know the difference between satisfied, full and stuffed. I just had two measures: starving and stuffed. There wasn't anything in between. It took a while to get to know the subtle signals of the different levels of hunger, satisfaction and fullness. I still don't have it 100% right – and neither do any of the normal eaters I know. We all

overeate sometimes, and let ourselves get too hungry sometimes. It's called life!

If you eat when you're not hungry, you won't recognise the body's cues for physical satisfaction and will be less able to stop when you've had enough. Similarly, if you regularly only start to eat when you're too hungry, it's difficult to notice when you've had enough. The feeling of satisfaction is when you're no longer hungry, you can feel that you've eaten, your energy has been restored, but you could still have some more. You're not FULL. Having said this, DON'T FIGHT with yourself. It may take time to be able to stop at satisfied. That's ok. If you start to fight with yourself about it, it's a war you can't win, and you'll rebel, maybe not right then, but you will!

3. Give yourself unconditional permission to eat anything you want, any time you want it

I can literally hear you say WHAT????????????????????? I'll eat myself out of house and home! I'll need a wheelbarrow to wheel me outta here! You have to be kidding – I have no self control, no willpower – I practically have to padlock my cupboards to stop myself eating.

I'll let you into a secret. This knowledge I'm going to share with you was hugely revelatory for me. It's so simple, I can't believe the dieting industry has pulled the wool over our eyes for so long. **DEPRIVATION CAUSES THE PROBLEM OF OVEREATING IN THE FIRST PLACE.** The biological drive to survive is huge, it's primal, it's enormously powerful. If we don't eat when we're hungry, if we deprive ourselves of food, we WILL overeat eventually. That's why we keep going on diets! We lose the weight, then we regain the weight (and some, in preparation for the next famine), so we diet again to lose the weight – on and on and on!

You might be thinking – ok, I get why depriving myself of food can cause

overeating, but really, eat WHATEVER I WANT? REALLY? We've been brainwashed into thinking that we mustn't eat this that or the other, depending on what the latest 'research' is, or what the most in-vogue celebrity is doing. But other research shows that if you allow a child to really choose from a wide variety of foods, he or she will choose a good balance over a period of time.

Let's do a little experiment. Don't think about elephants... OK? How did that go? I bet the image that popped into your mind was an elephant or three. Right? You see, when we tell our brains not to do something, it doesn't register the 'not'. It registers the thing. So saying that we can't, mustn't, or won't eat chocolate or crisps immediately conjures up that image.

When my brother was small, my mother heard him use a swear word. Instead of telling him he couldn't say that word, she completely ignored it, and whispered in his ear 'You can say ---t whenever you like, but don't EVER say capouna.' Guess what my brother did (for a good while I might add!) - you guessed it - he said capouna at every opportunity. My mother made a big fuss which made him use it more, and he forgot about the other word completely.

Do you see the point? When we're told what we can't do, our tendency is to rebel. We want to be in charge of our own lives and to make our own decisions, it's part of what makes us human! If you've had children, or been around toddlers, you'll know that I mean! Same thing goes for us! As soon as we start ordering ourselves around, saying we're not going to eat this and we're cutting out that, we're asking for trouble.

Please don't misinterpret this to mean unconditional permission to binge - although of course, if that's what you want to do, go right ahead, but it isn't a step towards Peaceful Eating! It's not what I'm suggesting here.

I'm saying if you drop the food rules, you'll relax around food more. It won't have power over you. You can choose what to eat, because you won't be fighting with yourself or depriving yourself.

4. Eat what loves you!

So now you probably think I'm completely bonkers – I mean how can food love you! Or maybe you're thinking I mean you should eat your nearest and dearest! What I actually mean is each body is different. We don't all respond to foods in the same ways. When working towards Peaceful Eating, part of the process is getting to know which foods feel right and good in your body. I used to think chocolate felt amazing in my body. What I've learned since I've been paying close attention to my body's responses to foods, is that cheap milk chocolate makes me feel ill – nauseous, dizzy, and my heart thumps very fast. And lately dark (even very dark) chocolate gives me a very painful stomach ache for about half an hour. I'm not sure whether I didn't notice this before because for years (decades) I was too busy overriding my body's preferences, ignoring what food felt like in my body, that I'd desensitised myself to certain foods, or if it's a new thing (from over-use maybe?!). The point is, become aware of your body's responses to foods after you've eaten them. Notice how you feel physically – energetic or lethargic? Light or heavy? The sticking point is accepting and making peace with what your *body* actually wants. Sometimes the mind doesn't want to get on board with it – and that's part of the work that needs to be done to become a Peaceful Eater.

5. When you eat, eat. Enjoy your food! Taste each mouthful.

Many of us are so uncomfortable with ourselves, we don't take time to really taste our food. We say we love the taste – but how many times have I reached the end of a meal (bar of chocolate, bowl of ice cream) and wondered where it all went? I didn't even notice. The brain likes to know that it's eaten! This means paying attention to the experience of

eating. Take in as much of the sensory experience as you can: the aroma; the texture; the presentation; the taste; even the sound of eating – the crunch or the slurp or the chewiness. Allow yourself the pleasure food gives! You'll find you're more able to notice when you've had enough, and more willing to stop, because you've had the full experience.

6. Move your body in a way that gives you JOY

Many people have an aversion to exercise because it's associated with dieting and feeling deprived. But our bodies are made for movement. We were not built to be sitting! When we take out the have tos about exercise (run x kilometers, do y push ups, spend z hours on the bike) and move in a way that brings us joy and fun, there's nothing like it! It doesn't take much to feel the difference of regular exercise.

When we move our bodies, in a kind and fun way, we also begin to develop a relationship with it. It's easier to know when you're hungry and satisfied when you have a relationship with your body. Many of us are disconnected from our bodies from the neck down. We don't know what we're feeling, and we don't embody our bodies. This issue can't be solved without connecting the bits that are disconnected – and it's important that it's something you ENJOY. If it doesn't bring you joy, don't do it. The time for using physical exercise as a punishment for overeating is OVER. DONE.

MIND

1. Tell the truth

Oooh this is a hard one, dear people. We are *very* used to denial! And lying. I've lied so much about my behaviour with food – to myself as well as to others. Sneaking food is a lie. My husband used to say to me 'I don't understand how you put on so much weight – you hardly eat anything!' That's because I wasn't being truthful to him OR myself about what I was putting in my mouth. If I was standing up and eating, it didn't count; if no-one saw, it didn't count; if it was just a spoonful (and then another, and then another), it didn't count; if the food was in my pocket, it didn't count. Sound familiar? If we take away the good and bad value judgements about food, and more importantly stop making *ourselves* good or bad depending on what we eat, then it's easier to tell the truth about it. Yes, I had a slab of chocolate; yes, I ate that last brownie. It was me. No biggie. Just as if it was anyone else who had eaten the last cupcake, it would be fine too – I mean someone's going to eat it, why do I make *me* bad if it was me???

There's a whole book to be written on telling the truth, and it's something I've written about on my website. I don't mean just about the food we've eaten or not, but about what *we make it all mean*. For example, is it true that I'm a useless failure if I ate the last brownie? Does it mean I'll never heal if I've eaten a slab of chocolate? No! But we talk to ourselves like this as though it's fundamentally true! Yes, it's not a healthy choice; yes, it was more than I needed; yes, I felt sick afterwards – but does any of that make me a useless failure as a human being? Heaping recriminations onto ourselves does not lead to Peaceful Eating. It's upsetting, we feel guilt and shame – and are more likely to repeat the behaviour to comfort ourselves. I've done this so many times! What about you?

2. Learn to recognise and meet your needs appropriately

This is a huge topic, and material for a whole book for sure. It boils down to this: we have learned to meet a whole range of our needs with food. The needs I most tried to meet with food are: rest; safety; love; stimulation; and a sense of purpose. One of my teachers says, if hunger is not the problem, food is not the answer, or another way of saying it: would a cold boiled potato/ chicken breast solve this problem? One of the best ways of looking at this, is to ask yourself, 'How do I want to feel *after* I've eaten this food.' See if the answer you get points you to a non-physical-hunger need. For example, if the answer is 'comforted,' or 'settled' – then you're probably trying to meet the need for comfort or safety. This takes practice and self-awareness.

3. Forgive yourself, forgive others

As I'm writing, I can see how these topics need a lot more room! The subject of forgiveness is a deep and broad one. Usually the one we need to forgive most is ourselves! How hard I've been on myself, not just for my behaviour around food, but for everything – every little mistake, or misjudgement; it's so unkind! The thing is, being hard on ourselves does not make us change our behaviour. We can't beat ourselves into change. Have you seen dogs that have been trained with negative reinforcement? They only behave well in front of the master who doles out the punishment. But a dog that has been trained with kindness, firmness and positive reinforcement is a pleasure to have around; its behaviour doesn't need constant monitoring! It's the same with us – kindness, love and forgiveness work miracles.

Then there's forgiveness of others who we think have wronged us. Let me say this: resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. We hurt *ourselves* when we're resenting another. Those feelings of ill-will are feelings in *our* bodies, not in the body of the person

we're resenting! And then we eat the feeling so we can avoid feeling it! Find a way to let go of holding on. It doesn't mean condoning the behaviour; you don't have to like what happened – but let's face it – it happened. You can't change that fact. All you can change is your attitude toward it now. You forgive for *YOU*, not for the other.

4. Learn to sit with discomfort

If there's ONE guideline to follow – one guideline that could make ALL the difference, it's this one. The importance of allowing ourselves to feel our discomfort, to allow it to be there without having to change it, is CRUCIAL to resolving our issues with food. If we medicate with food every time we feel a feeling we don't like; or a think a painful thought then we will never learn to eat when we're hungry, and not eat when we're not hungry. We won't learn to separate the act of eating, from the feelings unrelated to physical hunger.

The weird thing is that the pain of discomfort doesn't last that long (really – about 2 minutes!), but if we eat when we're not hungry and/or past our level of physical satisfaction, the discomfort *that* produces *does* linger – both the physical and the emotional!

SPIRIT

1. Develop the compassionate observer within

Without self awareness, the road to food freedom is a never ending one. The compassionate observer is a facility we can develop within us, that is – you got it, compassionate (!!!) and an observer. It's really simple – it means you observe yourself – your actions, your thoughts, your feelings, with KINDNESS (and not judgement), without having to change them or do anything about them. Now just because I said it was simple (which it is) does not mean that it's necessarily easy! It takes practice.

2. Practice gratitude

If we put our attention on the things we have in our lives NOW, rather than lament the things we think we lack, we feel more relaxed, more loving and open. Gratitude and fear cannot co-exist in the same moment. Consciously and purposefully practising gratitude leaves less room for fear and disappointment. My experience is that the more I have chosen gratitude, the less I've binged or eaten unconsciously. You do need to be present to feel gratitude, and when I'm being present, really here, really now, the need to eat for reasons other than physical hunger, evaporates.

3. Develop a practice to experience connection

For me, this was the last piece of the puzzle – the final practice that transformed my relationship with food. But first, what do I mean by connection? I mean accepting the truth that we are all connected, not only to each other as humans, but to every thing. As I've said elsewhere, this isn't woo-woo – it's quantum physics! However our culture is very much built on the illusion of separation. The me-first culture; the throw-away culture; the acquisitive culture; the competitive culture; the culture that allows and accepts inequality, poverty, depletion of resources, unsustainable waste... I have come to see my dysfunctional relationship with food as a direct function of my sense of separation. When I'm believing that I'm alone or separate on any level, it shows up on my plate. That is why I see a practice of connection as essential to becoming a Peaceful Eater. It's a daily practice to remember and more importantly *experience* that connection. My strong recommendation is meditation.

I spent years 'trying' to meditate, thinking there was a right way to do it (like a diet), and that I was doing it wrong and not having the experience one imagines Buddhist monks having – a state of undisturbed bliss. It

was only when I found a teacher, that I learned that the experience isn't what's important. Yes, a still, peaceful one is pleasant and enjoyable, but what matters is showing up. What matters, is the practice, no matter what. The effects are felt in our lives, in our relationships, not just in the minutes or hours of sitting in meditation. Give yourself this one gift. It's precious beyond words. I suggest joining a local meditation group (Meetups is full of them!), looking on Youtube for some instructional videos, or purchasing CDs to get you started. You may need to experiment till you find something that resonates for you. I would steer away from teachers or approaches that are pedantic or fixed in their views that their way is the one and only way.

4. Get Support!

It's hard travelling this path alone – I couldn't do it alone, and I certainly tried for a few decades. Having the support of someone or a group is SO important! And I don't mean your dieting buddy or your go-to-person to confess about how much you ate and to whom you make promises to 'be good' from tomorrow, or Monday, or whenever. I mean someone who can be alongside you, to hold up the mirror and reflect back what s/he is seeing. Someone who is willing to lovingly challenge and encourage you, without judging. Often the people we're closest to aren't the best suited for this type of support! For me, it was only when I sought outside support that things changed significantly.

So if you are serious about making peace with your body and food – please get support. You now know a lot about me and my personal struggles and path to a place of peaceful eating. I would love the opportunity to help you find your own peace with food and your body.

I have two routes on offer:

A free [Facebook Support Group](#). This is a closed group, which means that

only the members in the group can see the content. It's a place to share, be heard, be seen and acknowledged. It's a place to give and receive support.

To find out more about how I work, I also offer a no-strings 60 minute [Discovery Session](#) in which we get clear on where you are now, what you want instead, and what might be getting in your way.

Whatever you do, know that you are lovable and valuable no matter what. No matter what your size or weight, no matter what your food behaviours are *you matter*. Even if you don't want to do anything to change your relationship with your body and food – yes even then! Know too that there is nothing you have to do to earn your lovability. Not a single thing. It's given. Go well, go gently.

PERMISSIONS

My intention for this work is that it is widely shared with as many people as possible. Please feel free to reprint, publish, and share any part of this e-book with anyone who you think might benefit from it.

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