

Hunger vs Fullness Scale Guide

Understanding Your Body's Signals

What is the hunger/fullness scale?

The hunger/fullness scale is a simple tool that helps you tune into your body's natural signals about when to eat and when to stop. It uses a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is painfully stuffed and 10 is absolutely starving.

Most of us have lost touch with these signals through years of dieting, eating by the clock, or ignoring what our body is telling us. This scale helps you reconnect.

How to check in

Before eating, place your hand on your stomach and ask: "On a scale of 1-10, how hungry am I?"

During eating, pause every few minutes and check in again.

After eating, notice where you ended up on the scale.

Remember

Your body knows what it needs. The more you practice checking in, the easier it becomes to hear what your body is telling you. Trust yourself.

The scale

1 - PAINFULLY STUFFED You're so full it hurts. You feel sick, sluggish, and deeply uncomfortable. You might need to unbutton your pants. You regret eating this much and just want to lie down.

2 - VERY UNCOMFORTABLE You're extremely full and uncomfortable. Your stomach feels stretched and tight. You're definitely past the point of enjoyment. Moving feels difficult.

3 - UNCOMFORTABLY FULL You ate too much. You're past satisfied and into uncomfortable territory. You wish you'd stopped eating a few bites ago. Your stomach feels heavy and bloated.

4 - SLIGHTLY UNCOMFORTABLE You're a bit too full. Not painful, but you're aware you could have stopped sooner. You're starting to feel that "I ate too much" feeling creeping in.

5 - NEUTRAL / SATISFIED You're content. Not hungry, not full. You could eat if food was in front of you, but you don't need to. This is a comfortable resting state.

6 - COMFORTABLY SATISFIED ← IDEAL STOPPING POINT You're pleasantly satisfied. You've had enough food and feel content. You could stop eating here and feel good. Your stomach feels comfortable, not stretched. You have energy and feel nourished.

7 - SATISFIED BUT COULD EAT MORE ← IDEAL STOPPING POINT You've taken the edge off your hunger. You're no longer hungry but could keep eating if you wanted to. This is the sweet spot for ending a meal, you feel satisfied without being overly full.

8 - NOTICEABLY HUNGRY ← IDEAL STARTING POINT Your stomach is starting to feel empty. You're thinking about food. Your energy might be dipping slightly. This is a good time to eat, you're hungry enough to enjoy your food but not so hungry you'll rush.

9 - VERY HUNGRY ← IDEAL STARTING POINT You're definitely hungry. Your stomach might be growling. You're having trouble concentrating on anything other than food. You need to eat soon. This is the edge of the ideal eating window, any hungrier and you'll eat too quickly.

10 - STARVING You're ravenous. You're shaky, irritable, maybe even dizzy or getting a headache. You'll eat anything in sight and you'll eat it fast because you've waited too long. This is survival mode, not mindful eating mode.

The ideal eating window

Start eating when you're at 3-4 on the hunger scale This means you're noticeably hungry but not ravenous. You have an appetite and food sounds appealing, but you're still able to make mindful choices about what to eat. You're hungry enough to enjoy your food but not so desperate that you'll inhale it without tasting.

Stop eating when you're at 6-7 on the hunger scale This means you're comfortably satisfied. You've had enough food to feel content and nourished, but you're not overly full or uncomfortable. You have energy, your stomach feels comfortable, and you could get up from the table and go about your day without feeling sluggish.

How to check in with your hunger

Before eating Pause and take three deep breaths. Place your hand on your stomach and ask yourself, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how hungry am I right now?" Wait for the answer to come from your body, not your mind.

During eating Every few minutes whilst you're eating, pause with your fork down and check in again. "Where am I on the hunger scale now?" This helps you notice when you're approaching that 6-7 sweet spot.

After eating A few minutes after you finish, check in one more time. "How do I feel now? Where am I on the scale?" This gives you valuable feedback about whether you stopped at the right point.

Common challenges

"I can't tell where I am on the scale" This is completely normal if you've been disconnected from your body's signals for a long time. Start by just noticing extremes, can you tell the difference between a 2 (painfully full) and an 8 (very hungry)? Once you can identify the extremes, the middle numbers become easier.

"I'm always at a 10 by the time I eat" This means you're waiting too long between meals or snacks. Try eating at regular intervals throughout the day so you never get to that ravenous state. Keep healthy snacks available so you can eat when you hit an 8 instead of waiting until you're a 10.

"I don't feel hungry until I'm starving" A dysregulated nervous system can dampen hunger signals. When you're stressed or anxious, your body suppresses hunger because it's in survival mode. Working on regulating your nervous system throughout the day will help you start feeling hunger signals earlier.

"I'm always eating past a 7" This often happens when you're eating too quickly or whilst distracted. Slow down, put your fork down between bites, and check in with your hunger regularly during the meal. It takes about twenty minutes for your brain to register fullness, so eating slowly gives your body time to tell you when you've had enough.



"I feel guilty leaving food on my plate" You were taught to clean your plate as a child, but you're an adult now and you get to decide when you've had enough. Your body is not a rubbish bin. Leaving food when you're satisfied is respecting your body, not wasting food.

Practice tips

Start with just awareness For the first week, don't try to change anything. Just practice checking in with your hunger scale three times per day (morning, midday, evening) to get familiar with what different levels feel like in your body.

Keep a hunger journal Write down where you are on the hunger scale before and after meals for a few days. This helps you see patterns, like always eating when you're a 10, or always stopping at a 3.

Set reminders to check in Put reminders in your phone to check your hunger scale at regular intervals throughout the day. This builds the habit of tuning into your body's signals.

Be patient with yourself Reconnecting with your hunger and fullness signals takes time, especially if you've been ignoring them for years. Some days will be easier than others. Just keep practicing with compassion for yourself.

Remember

The hunger/fullness scale is a tool to help you reconnect with your body's natural wisdom about when and how much to eat. The goal isn't perfection, it's awareness. The more you practice checking in, the easier it becomes to hear what your body is telling you.

Aim to start eating around a 3-4 and stop around a 6-7 most of the time. This keeps you nourished, energised, and comfortable without the extremes of ravenous hunger or painful fullness.

Trust your body, it knows what it needs.

For the pretty, coloured version with the need-to-know parts, head over to the [Taking Stress off Your Plate Workbook](#).