

The Benefits of Eating Alone

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Growing up, I had no idea how lucky I was that my mom cooked dinner for the entire family every night. The four of us sat down to a family meal, discussed the day and ate nourishing food. I look back at those times with a sense of wonder that we were able to come together almost every single night. Now, as a 30-something entrepreneur without children, I tend to eat most of my meals alone. Sure, my partner and I eat dinner together sporadically throughout the week, but some nights are just me, my dinner, and my iPad.

And I'm not alone in this routine.

In fact, 46 percent of adult eating occasions are completely alone, according to a [report by The Hartman Group](#), a collection of anthropologists, social scientists, and business analysts who study American food and beverage culture. They attribute this to cultural effects of World War II, such as more mothers joining the workforce, an increase in single-parent households, a growing focus on technology, eating alone at work, hectic schedules, and the rise in adults living alone.

As a dietitian, I have to watch out for bad habits that are associated with eating alone, such as a [higher risk for metabolic disease](#) or [lower overall diet quality](#) and nutrient intake. Plus, using tech as a distraction when eating alone (scanning social media or watching TV) can contribute to mindless eating. (Related: [What to Do When Intuitive Eating Just Isn't Sticking](#))

Still, since I find myself eating so many of my own meals alone—and it's clear many others have the same eating routines—I wanted to make sure eating alone didn't get an unfairly bad rep. You should know about the benefits of solo dining as well.

The Practice of Eating Alone

Have you ever arrived at a bar long before your always-late friend and found yourself feeling pretty awkward sitting there by yourself? You probably pulled out your phone to keep busy until your friend rolls up twenty minutes later. It's only natural to feel strange when sitting alone at a communal space like a bar or restaurant, especially since dinner and drinks with friends and family create tighter bonds and memories.

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Mujeres que impulsan a otras mujeres. Así es como la modelo Rosie Mercado usa su poder para ayudar a otros.

But shift your thinking for a minute. Is it really that terrible to end up at the bar or dinner table alone? As a matter of fact, some may argue that it's a form of self-care to say the heck with social norms and have some alone time in a very not-alone environment.

Although solo dining may still feel taboo for many Americans, it's already an established practice in Asia. South Koreans even have a word for it: Honbap, which means "eat alone." The #honbap hashtag even has 1.7 million posts on Instagram. In Japan, a popular restaurant called ICHIRAN serves ramen in solo stalls, and they just added a location in New York City. According to the website, the solo dining booths were "designed to allow [you] to focus on the flavors of your bowl with minimal distractions...[and were] created in response to the many distractions and loud surroundings of a typical ramen restaurant." (This sounds a lot like mindful eating to me.)

Whether you mean to or not, you're likely eating many of your meals as a party of one. But rather than feel embarrassed at the bar without your friend, why not embrace it as a form of self-care? Interestingly, 18 percent of the people interviewed by the Hartman Group said they choose to eat alone because they consider it "me time." If you're hesitant to eat unaccompanied, here are a few reasons eating alone is awesome.

You get to try new things. If you can't find anyone to go with you to that fancy prix-fixe vegan restaurant, ditch them and go it alone. (The same can be said for that vacation you've been wanting to take. Read: The Best Solo Travel Destinations for Women)

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- It opens up new doors. Enjoy your surroundings and maybe strike up a conversation with the person next to you. You never know if you'll meet your new best friend or partner.
- It gives you a confidence boost. There's something about embracing your solo status that can make you feel self-assured AF. Heck, after your solo meal, try going to the movies alone.

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