

12 Steps to Better Health

Step 3: March Learn How To Read Your Food “Fuel Gauge”

When we were a baby, we did a great job of regulating our calories. When we were hungry, we cried and Mom fed us. When we were full, we stopped. We weren't tempted by the chips in the pantry or the 'hot donuts' sign.



Now we are surrounded by so many chances to eat, we don't always pay attention to our natural hunger signals — our food “fuel gauge.” Take some time to notice how many times you see something to eat, or something that encourages you to eat, during the day. Try to pay close attention to why you want to eat something. Is your own “fuel gauge” telling you that you are empty, or are you eating just because you can? Sometimes we need to re-learn how to tell when we are truly hungry and when we are becoming full. Try one of these ideas to make sure your “fuel gauge” is working like it should:

1. **Eat before your “fuel gauge” reaches 10% above empty; stop eating before you reach 90% full.** Pay attention to what your body is really telling you and how to read your hunger signals. If we let our fuel gauge get too low, we can eat too much in response to that hungry feeling. Also, if we do not pay attention to our body, we can eat so much at once that we feel bad, *and* we put on extra weight! Planning healthy meals and being prepared with nutritious snacks will help you to keep your “fuel gauge” from getting too low, or high.
2. **Wait 20 minutes before you take seconds.** It often takes our brain about 20 minutes to get the message from our stomach that we have eaten enough. If you eat a healthy, well-portioned meal and then wait 20 minutes, your body has a chance to get caught up. If you are still hungry after 20 minutes, have some extra salad or other non-starchy vegetables. They are lower in calories and higher in fiber than most other foods. They will fill you up without putting you in too much danger of eating more calories than you may need.
3. **Drink a glass of water.** Sometimes we think we are hungry when we really are thirsty. It is kind of like how your car doesn't run as well when your engine oil is low. A little bit of fluid may be what it takes to get you back up to speed. Don't forget to wait 20 minutes before you decide if you are still hungry!

