

Differentiate Between Hunger, Desire and Cravings

Almost all dieters have had difficulties distinguishing between true hunger (*when you've fasted for several hours and your stomach is empty*), desire to eat (*not being particularly hungry but eating because there is food around*) and craving (*a physiological and emotionally intense urge to eat*). Interestingly, many of them initially thought they could tell the difference. What about you?

Think about times in the past when you've leisurely finished a rather large meal, perhaps when eating out at a restaurant or during a family celebration. I wonder if you ever had such thoughts as *"I'm still hungry ...I think I'll have seconds ...I'm hungry for dessert"*.

If so, you confused hunger with a desire to eat. This week's task will help you figure out when you're truly hungry, so you can tell yourself *"Okay, I've finished the food I planned to eat for this meal, and I'm still hungry ...but that's okay ...it might take 20 minutes for my brain to register that I am full ...I'll wait to see how I feel in 20 minutes"*.

Or you might try saying to yourself, *"Okay, I'm hungry, no big deal, I'm going to eat again in few hours ... here's a chance to strengthen my resistance muscle"*.

Or think to yourself, *"I'm not hungry ...I just want to eat more ... but I'm not going to because I don't want to strengthen my giving-in muscle"*.

Monitor Your Hunger

How do you know when you're really hungry? Think about three recent occasions when the following occurred:

- You hadn't eaten for many hours and really felt ravenous. That empty sensation in your stomach, often accompanied by stomach rumblings, was ***hunger***.
- You ate a big meal and yet you still wanted to continue to eat more. That was a ***desire***.
- You had a very strong urge to eat, which was accompanied by a feeling of tension and an unpleasant yearning sensation in your mouth, throat or body. That was a ***craving***.

To better differentiate between these sensations, pick a day to note what you experience before, during and after you eat.

- ✓ Before you sit down to eat each meal and snack, notice how your stomach feels. Write a description of this feeling in **My Hunger Monitoring Chart** attached. Also, rate your stomach hunger on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not hungry and 10 being the hungriest you've ever felt.
- ✓ Halfway through the meal, notice how your stomach feels. Write a description of this sensation in the chart. Then rate your hunger, using the same 0 to 10 scale.
- ✓ Rate your hunger again once you've finished eating. Notice your thoughts: Do you still want to eat more? Do you feel a physical sensation in your stomach? Is it more in your mouth or throat? What does it feel like? How strong are your sensations? Do you want to eat a specific food (which probably means you're desiring or craving) or will any food so (which probably means you are still hungry)? Describe the sensation in the chart.
- ✓ Twenty minutes after you've finished eating, rate your hunger and then describe any physical sensations or desire to eat that you're experiencing in the chart.

See sample of my own Hunger Monitoring Chart below:

Time	How My Stomach Feels	Strength of Hunger (0-10)
Before dinner	Very empty, a little bit of growling	8
Midway through dinner	A little fuller	5
Immediately after dinner	Mildly full, but want to eat seconds; feel an urge in my mouth and throat	2
20 minutes after dinner	Full, satisfied, glad I didn't eat too much	0

After a day of paying attention to the sensation in your abdomen and body, you'll be better able to distinguish between "hungry" and "not hungry." Whenever you know your stomach is full but you still want to eat, start labelling this state as desire or a craving.

TIP

If it has been anywhere from 20 minutes up to 3 hours since you've eaten a reasonable-sized meal, remind yourself that any urge to eat is probably due to a **desire** to eat, not hunger

What are you thinking?

Below are some common sabotaging thoughts and responses. Make Response Cards for any that ring true to you.

Sabotaging Thought: I don't need to do this. I know the difference between hunger and craving.

Helpful Response: I might know the difference on an intellectual level, but it's still important for me to experience the difference on a physical level. I probably sometimes label a craving as hunger. It's very important for me to do this exercise so I'll know whether I really am too hungry too often (which is a problem I'll need to solve) or whether I'm really craving (which is a sensation I'll learn to tolerate)

Sabotaging Thought: This task is too much trouble. I don't feel like doing it.

Helpful Response: It doesn't take very much time or energy. Why not try it and see what happens?

Sabotaging Thought: Why do I need to know the difference? I'm just going to follow my diet plan anyway.

Helpful Response: When I get to maintenance, I can be more flexible with my eating if I eat only in response to hunger. Unless I practice differentiating between hunger and craving now, I won't be able to do this successfully and I'll gain weight.

Part 6

Hunger, Desire, Craving

My Hunger Monitoring Chart

Use this chart to complete today's task, with 0 being not hungry and 10 being the hungriest you've ever felt.

Time	How My Stomach Feels	Strength of Hunger (0-10)
Before breakfast	<hr/> <hr/>	
Midway through breakfast	<hr/> <hr/>	
Immediately after breakfast	<hr/> <hr/>	
20 minutes after breakfast	<hr/> <hr/>	
Before lunch	<hr/> <hr/>	
Midway through lunch	<hr/> <hr/>	
Immediately after lunch	<hr/> <hr/>	
20 minutes after lunch	<hr/> <hr/>	
Before dinner	<hr/> <hr/>	
Midway through dinner	<hr/> <hr/>	
Immediately after dinner	<hr/> <hr/>	
20 minutes after dinner	<hr/> <hr/>	

Anti-Craving Strategies

Mind-set Techniques

You can take a number of steps to respond to your next craving. The first five steps will help you prepare your mind-set, and you should use the following every time you have a craving.

- 1. Label it.** Tell yourself, *this feeling is just a craving... it is uncomfortable and intense, but (like hunger) it's not an emergency.*
- 2. Stand firm.** Tell yourself that you are absolutely not going to eat the food that you are craving. Remind yourself that you truly don't want to strengthen your *giving-in* muscle and weaken your *resistance* muscle. Ask yourself whether giving into this craving will be worth the momentary pleasure you'll get from eating. Think about how giving in will undermine your confidence.
- 3. Don't give yourself a choice.** The emotionally painful part about a craving is the struggle you feel. Once you can tell yourself with total conviction, **NO CHOICE**, and do something else, the cravings will diminish. It won't go away though if you waver or say to yourself *"This is so intense, I don't know if I can stand it"*. Of course, you can stand it! It might be uncomfortable, but nothing bad will happen if you withstand it. In fact in a few moments, you're going to be so proud of yourself!
- 4. Imagine the aftermath of giving in.** Think about eating the food that you're craving. Imagine it in your mouth. How many seconds does it take to eat it? How many seconds do you feel pleasure? Now visualise the rest of the picture – the part of the experience that you usually don't think about until it's too late. Picture yourself feeling weak and out of control. See yourself upset, giving up, continuing to eat more and more, feeling worse and worse. Do you start to feel heavier in your body or heavy –hearted? As you become upset in the image, remind yourself how many times you've given in before, how you promised yourself you wouldn't do it again, and how hopeless you felt. Now that you've seen the entire picture, which seems better: eating or not eating?
- 5. Remind yourself why you want to learn to withstand cravings.** Read your **Advantages Response Cards**. You won't be able to attain the benefits of losing weight unless you tolerate your cravings. If you continue to give in to them you will always be at risk of gaining weight.

Behavioural Techniques

If you are still tempted to eat something after you have done all your mind-set techniques, then try as many of the behavioural techniques below as needed;

- 1. Distance yourself from the food you crave.** When you experience a craving because you see or smell food, you might be able to move that food to an inconvenient place (where you can't see it) or to get rid of it (give it away, or throw it away). If you can't remove it, remove *yourself* – leave the room, go to another part of the room, go to the bathroom (and read your response cards), or go outside.
- 2. Drink a no-calorie drink or hot drink.** Thirst can mask as hunger and trigger you to eat. Consider drinking water with lemon, diluted juice etc.
- 3. Relax.** You can teach yourself how to relax in a variety of ways. One simple relaxation technique is to simply focus on your breathing. Breathe in and out of your nose, slowly counting to four as you inhale and again to four as you exhale. Use very shallow breathes; don't let your chest rise and fall. Set a timer and keep up this technique for three full minutes. At the end of the three minutes, you should feel calmer and more in control of your cravings.
- 4. Distract yourself.** Do you remember a time when a natural distraction interrupted your craving and you were glad you didn't eat? Maybe a friend called, the dog insisted on going for a walk... you focused your attention on something else and before you knew it you forgot about your craving. Watching TV is not helpful in this respect because of the high volume of advertising. Adverts are designed to promote dissatisfaction with ourselves and encourage us to eat more!

Distractions

You'll probably initially find that you need a pretty strong distraction to get your attention off the food you crave. Here are some things I use to distract myself:

<i>Brush your teeth</i>	<i>Paint your nails</i>	<i>Call a friend</i>
<i>Go for a walk</i>	<i>Read a book</i>	<i>Read your response cards</i>
<i>Go for a cycle</i>	<i>Take a shower/bath</i>	<i>Do arts and crafts</i>
<i>Write a letter or email</i>	<i>Browse the internet</i>	<i>Print photos off your PC</i>
<i>Do a jigsaw</i>	<i>Apply a face mask</i>	<i>Try out a new hair style</i>
<i>Write a "To Do" list</i>	<i>Go for a drive</i>	<i>Sort out laundry</i>

Try as many of these as you can and rate their effectiveness on a scale of 0-10 so you will know which ones work best for you in the future.

What are you thinking?

Sabotaging Thought: The next time I have a craving, I won't be able to tolerate it.

Helpful Response: I couldn't tolerate cravings in the past, but now I have lots of anti-craving techniques that I can use, which will make the craving go away. Besides, the discomfort of cravings is mild compared to the discomfort I felt when*I was at the dentist, for example ...* I tolerated that so I can certainly tolerate cravings.

Sabotaging Thought: I know myself. The next time I have a craving I won't want to control myself.

Helpful Response: That's probably true. But I can keep reminding myself that I don't want to be at the mercy of my cravings forever. To get rid of them, I'm always going to have to do one of two things: either give in and eat and never lose weight or use the anti-craving techniques so often that I won't have many cravings anymore. Once I find out these techniques really work, I'll be able to wait out my cravings much more easily. I'll be glad when I get to the point where I don't have to be worried when I go to a party or eat out. I'll know for sure that I can tolerate these urges.