

*Shifting Your Allegiance*  
**TO INTERNAL  
DRIVERS**

OF EATING

JENNA HOLLENSTEIN

eat  
to  
love

A Mindful Guide to  
Transforming Your Relationship  
with Food, Body, and Life

When you eat regularly throughout the day and discover your middle way of hunger and fullness, you might notice you are shifting your allegiance back from external factors telling you what, when, and how much to eat to internal sensations of physical hunger and fullness, personal preference, and what you find satisfying. You nourish your body by valuing its intelligence, part of which is known as interoceptive awareness. Interoception includes feeling the sensations sent by your body and understanding them in real time, which allows us to respond in ways that are precise, balanced, and nourishing. Instead of overriding or changing our experience as we did with magical eating, we acknowledge what is actually happening more authentically, with honesty and curiosity, and respond to our true needs. In shifting from external to internal cues, it can be helpful to fully explore the various external cues. On the following pages, note which external cues interfere with your ability to respond to internal cues.

External cues that tell us *what* to eat:

- “Eat this, not that” advice from doctors, dietitians, nutrition experts, and health coaches, or as read in traditional and social media
- Specific diet rules about what we should and should not eat (Paleo, vegan, raw, gluten-free, low-carb, low-fat, zero grams of sugar)
- Conscious or unconscious beliefs about foods being good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, virtuous or sinful
- Foods that seem appropriate in certain settings or situations (cereal for breakfast instead of salad, popcorn at a movie instead of shrimp cocktail)

External cues that tell us *when* to eat:

- Meal times (breakfast time, lunch time, snack time, dinner time, dessert time)
- Time of day (the moment we wake up, arriving at work, hitting the 3 p.m. slump, walking in the door after work, the moment we finish dinner, after the kids to go bed)
- The presence of food even if we’re not hungry (food leftover from a meeting in the conference room, the dessert tray appearing after an already satisfying meal, the availability of novel foods while staying at a friend’s house)
- Other people encouraging us to eat (“You’re going to make me eat alone?” or “You have to try this!”)
- Situations in which eating feels obligatory (work functions, family meals, bagel Fridays, pizza Mondays, birthday cake celebrations, free food offered as a pseudo-perk)
- Situational triggers (sitting in front of the TV, watching a movie, attending a sporting event, or being on a long drive)
- Emotional triggers (anger, sadness, loneliness, stress, happiness, or boredom)

External cues that tell us *how much* to eat:

- Package sizes
- Serving sizes as listed on nutrition labels
- Round numbers (10 chips, 20 almonds, etc.)
- How much we are served, and whether we are served by ourselves or by someone else
- Number of calories, points, exchanges, or grams of sugar, carbohydrates, protein, fat, or fiber in a particular food
- The amount eaten by other people
- The amount of food left in a package, carton, bag, or on a plate
- Certain situational triggers (sitting in front of the TV, getting too hungry, drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana)

As we pay more attention to the internal environment, we start to notice how they contradict deeply held concepts in our minds (usually externally driven concepts). How many times have you had the following thoughts?

- I shouldn't be hungry, I ate an hour ago.
- It's lunchtime, I should eat something.
- I'm hungry for carbs / chocolate / something salty, but I shouldn't eat it.
- I'm still hungry but I've already eaten a serving; I shouldn't eat any more.
- I'm full but there's food left on my plate; I might as well finish it.

While the sensations of hunger and fullness are internal physical experiences unique to your body, which suggests you are in fact the best judge of what, when, and how much to eat, at times you might have a greater allegiance to some external determinant. This is not a problem. Noticing the dissonance is a normal part of shifting your allegiance. Noticing when you feel pulled to behave in specific ways by external factors is an essential part of this process. It is also important to notice how a greater allegiance to external cues causes us to eat when we are not hungry, such as in the case of a mealtime arriving even though we are not experiencing hunger yet, or not to eat when we are hungry, as when we get hungry at 11 a.m. but it is not lunchtime yet.

External cues that most frequently get in the way of my listening to internal hunger and fullness sensations are:

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I can consciously shift my allegiance back to my internal hunger and fullness sensations in these moments by:

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