

If you're always half on a diet or watching calories and counting fat grams, it's likely that you have lost touch with hunger and satisfaction, your body's natural way of regulating food intake.

Reconnecting with hunger and the pleasurable, primal experience of satisfying it can change your relationship to food, say exercise physiologists and registered dietitians Karin Kratina, of the Renfrew Center in Coconut Creek, Florida, and Nancy L. King, of Nutrition Designs in Montrose, California. They have developed a process called HungerWork to help their clients get back in touch with their bodies' signals. The goal: to eat

your hunger will dissipate for a while as your body draws on its fuel reserves.

■ **You feel queasy, irritable, light-headed or tired.** The cause is low blood sugar. Feelings of hunger may have passed, but you need to eat even if the thought of food isn't all that appealing.

■ **Your stomach growls.** Air is passing through your intestines; that does not necessarily signal hunger.

■ **You crave a certain food.** Cravings are often emotional. If you are truly hungry, usually there is not one food you *must* have.

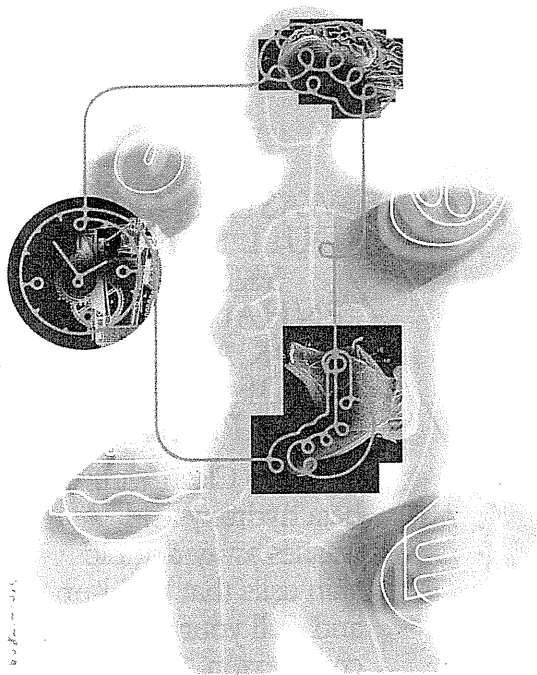
■ **It's "time for lunch."** If it's been more

■ **You think, This is all I'm supposed to have.** That's dieter's mind-set—the notion that a portion should be enough, whether or not it has satisfied you.

■ **Your waistband is getting tight.** If you rely on discomfort to help you stop, you're out of touch with your body's signals.

■ **True satiety is felt in the body. It often comes in phases.** First, you might feel pressure or some fullness in your stomach. Soon after that—usually about 20 minutes after you start eating—the physical signs of hunger may diminish or you may be less interested in your food.

## How can you tell when you're hungry?



than four hours since your last meal, you probably are hungry—unless your last meal was huge. If less time has passed, don't just go by your watch.

■ **The opportunity to eat something good arises.** Say you walk by a bakery and smell fresh bread. That may trigger a craving—possibly hunger-related, probably not. If you're not hungry, the food won't taste as good as it could.

■ **You're not hungry, but you're eating anyway.** On occasion, we all do. But it's often a sign that you really want something other than food. What is it that you want? Are you stressed or lonely? If you often use food to soothe your emotions or keep boredom at bay, food becomes less satisfying—because you're using it for

the wrong reasons. Ultimately, you won't be satisfied emotionally either.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN TO STOP?

If you become sensitive to your body's satiety signals, you'll know. Your body will tell you: it doesn't *like* being stuffed. But tuning in can be tricky, because the signals we hear most clearly tend to come from our heads, not our bodies.

■ **You may begin thinking about how much you've eaten.** This is often guilty awareness, not a sign that you're satisfied.

■ **You slow down because the person you're with stopped eating.** That's more about self-presentation than satisfaction.

■ **What if you feel full, but not quite satisfied?** It could be a sign that your meal was unbalanced. To be satisfying from a nutritional and sensory standpoint, a meal should provide protein, carbohydrates, some fat and a mix of tastes and textures.

■ **You're really stuffed.** Dieting may have given you a feast-or-famine mind-set. You may fear that you won't get enough food or that a moderate amount won't satisfy you long enough, so you overeat.

■ **What if you never get full?** You're probably not eating in response to hunger, so it is hard to know when to stop.

### HOW TO GET BACK IN TOUCH

Pick one meal a week when you can dine without distractions. Don't count calories or worry about whether the foods you're eating are "good" or "bad." Instead, pay attention to what your stomach feels like before, during and after eating. Try to discern the phases of fullness and satisfaction.

Before and after eating, rate your hunger on a scale from zero to ten. Zero is famished—weak from hunger—and ten is painfully, miserably stuffed. Five is comfortable—neither hungry nor full. Seven is comfortably full, and nine a bit too full. If you wait until you're at level one before you eat, you'll probably consume more than you need. Try to start when you're at stage two, three or four and stop when you reach stage seven or eight.

Then you can begin to carry your heightened awareness into situations where you're eating with others.

when hungry, stop when satisfied. By doing that, you can maintain your natural weight without worrying about it or being preoccupied with food.

### WHAT SIGNALS HUNGER, WHAT DOESN'T

■ **In the middle of an activity—writing a report at work, or doing your laundry on a weekend—you start thinking about food.** Should you suppress that thought? No! Often this is the first sign that your body needs nourishment.

■ **You feel a slight to gnawing emptiness in your stomach.** That's hunger, pure and simple. If you ignore these sensations,