



Done *With* Diets

The post-Pesach diet is always the easiest. After weeks of fried potatoes and sweet, spongy cakes, subsisting on salads is all too easy. Until Shavuot, that is. Blintzes and cheesecakes abound, and you put your calorie-counting on hold to indulge in all the *milchig* treats your diet would never allow. But then, after Yom Tov, you're so literally fed up that food restricting is a breeze. Until the next time you're tired or stressed or angry — and just can't resist treating yourself to a one-minute microwave brownie in a mug.

If you've ever wondered why keeping to a diet is so impossible, it's because diets are not designed to be kept. It's because, ironically, dieting keeps you tethered to food like one of those cheap wooden paddle ball sets kids bring home as prizes from school. You're the rubber ball on a string, reaching as far away from food as you can, trying to be "good" and be thin, until *smack* — you hit the paddle hard and find your self-control stands no chance against a jumbo bag of cheese curls. Or, as author Geneen Roth puts

it, "For every diet, there is an equal and opposite binge."

We tend to think that when it comes to food, there are two paths: counting carbs and fitting into little clothes, or eating anything and everything and watching yourself slowly inflate like a bounce house. But there is another path entirely; a way of finding your natural weight, while getting rid of the unhealthy obsession with food. It is called intuitive eating, and as radical as it may sound, it is really the most natural thing in the world.

Instead of listening to the diet advice of others, intuitive eating asks that you listen to the ultimate nutritional expert: your own body.

Nutrition Therapy

When Elyse Resch, MS, RDN, CEDRD, became a nutritionist 30 years ago, she started off, as nutritionists tend to, by putting people on a diet plan. "And they would follow it,"

Elisha Blumberg

she says, "until they wouldn't." The nature of diets is that they end, Ms. Resch realized, and figured there had to be a better way to deal with this dilemma.

"It's basic human nature that we don't like to be deprived or told what to do," says Ms. Resch, who worked with her colleague Evelyn Tribole to develop guidelines to help people overcome obsessive eating habits and work toward a healthy way to relate to food, from the inside out. Together they wrote the first edition of their groundbreaking book *Intuitive Eating* in 1995, and coined the term that would be widely adopted to describe a non-diet approach to eating.

In their book, Resch and Tribole lay out the 10 Principles of Intuitive Eating (see sidebar). These principles are flexible and are not meant as a replacement for the rigid rules so often associated with diets; they are, instead, a set of guidelines designed to help you get in touch with your inner "intuitive eater" and leave food obsession behind for good.

"My book is the opposite of restrictive eating," Ms. Resch says, hailing her intuitive approach to eating as a way to attain not only a healthy body, but a healthy relationship to food. With her years of experience as a nutrition therapist, Ms. Resch works to help her clients, primarily women, work on issues related to emotional eating and physical self-image.

"With the intuitive eating method, I've seen people move from seriously disordered eating to having a remarkable sense of freedom with food," she says. In other words, they become the kind of odd people who have to throw out chocolate-covered wafers from *mishloach manos* before Pesach because they simply forgot to finish them.

A Cure for the Food Frenzy

Geneen Roth, a writer whose many works delve into the psychology of emotional eating, is proof that mindful eating is the way to a healthy relationship with food, even for someone with disordered eating. In her book, *Breaking Free From Compulsive Eating*, Ms. Roth shares her personal journey to a diet-free life.

After 17 years of extreme yo-yo dieting, having been both anorexic and a binge

10 Principles of Intuitive Eating

(adapted from *Intuitive Eating* by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch)

1. Reject the Diet Mentality

To benefit from intuitive eating, you must completely free yourself from the dieting mindset. Dismiss the notion that you need someone else to tell you how and what to eat; believe wholly in your body's inherent ability to choose its ideal fuel.

2. Honor Your Hunger

Recognize that hunger is not something to be ignored; it's your body's call that it needs to eat — heed it! Waiting too long to respond will make you more likely to eat too much, or eat food you won't be satisfied with.

3. Make Peace With Food

Banish the fears you may have developed about particular foods. Illegalizing cheesecake or chocolate will make them all the more alluring, and lead to feelings of deprivation and guilt. Embracing every food will give you the power to choose what you really want — or don't.

4. Challenge the Food Police

If every time you reach for a slice of bread you hear your Zumba instructor scolding you for ingesting all those carbs, roll your eyes. Realize that the only way to overcome destructive eating habits is to erase the criticism of food bullies from your mind. Become your own nutritional advocate.

5. Respect Your Fullness

Intuitive eating is about listening to your body's signals. It is not an excuse to binge. Learn to discover what real hunger and fullness feels like, and respond accordingly. If you find it hard to stop eating when full, remind yourself that in just a few hours you'll be hungry again, and can eat *anything* you want. And remember that when you're hungry, you'll enjoy it much more.

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eater, having gained and lost hundreds of pounds in the years since she had begun dieting as a young girl, Ms. Roth recognized that there had to be a way to achieve peace with food. She decided that as long as she ate consciously, calmly and without distractions, she could eat *whatever* she wanted, as long as she was hungry.

In the very beginning of her experiment, giddy from the permission to eat all the delicious food she had previously denied herself, she writes, “For two weeks I ate chocolate chip cookies in various shapes and consistencies for breakfast, lunch, dinner and in-between.” But after letting go of all the external food restrictions and the accompanying guilt she experienced for so many years, Ms. Roth learned to really listen to what her body needed and ultimately left behind the prison that the diet-binge cycle had been for her.

In the first few months of her non-restricted eating she gained 15 pounds due to the excitement of getting to eat all the illegal goodies she had craved for so many years, but once she realized chocolate chip cookies were not going anywhere, she quickly lost the extra weight. Over the next two years of eating intuitively, whatever she wanted whenever she was hungry, she lost 30 pounds and found a weight she was comfortable with.

Why Diets Don't Work

Imagine letting someone else dictate your sleeping habits. You'd be given an allowance of minutes of shuteye per night, and a time to retire and awaken. But what if I'm tired? That's for the weak! What if I don't want to go to bed right now? The sleep expert knows what your body needs; shush!

This is clearly a ridiculous scenario. Why would you put anyone else in charge of your body when you can surely do a better job yourself? But with diets, you're doing the same — outsourcing a physical need to someone who does not inhabit your body. Just as you instinctively know when you need rest, your body is programmed to know when and what to feed itself.

Just watch a child eat.

“Look at a baby and you'll see that humans are born with all the knowledge they need to feed themselves properly,” says Elyse Resch. “Before a child learns about the desirability of ‘play food’ versus regular food, he will always pick out a balanced meal.”

Even when kids learn about treats, they almost always display an instinctive moderation that can be downright shocking. Ever watch a child eat ice cream? She might look forward

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6. Discover the Satisfaction Factor

Even a five-course gourmet meal won't be enough if you eat it in the wrong situation. Be picky not only about what you eat, but also where you eat it. Eating while seated, without distractions (no reading!) and in a calm environment will help you enjoy the experience and be fully satisfied with your food.

7. Honor Your Feelings Without Using Food

Eating as a response to an emotional state is an easy short-term solution. But after the bowl of chips is gone, you're still with the original problem along with unnecessary weight and discomfort. Discover ways to deal with your emotional state without comforting yourself with cookies.

8. Respect Your Body

Do not allow popular culture to determine what the ideal size is. Hashem created us all with a natural weight set point that we can reach by eating in response to hunger. Trying to be thinner than your natural build allows will only freeze you in a permanent state of unhappiness. Understand that there is no such thing as the perfect size — only what is perfect for you.

9. Exercise and Feel the Difference

Viewing exercise as punishment for overeating robs you of the chance to feel the joy of being active. Instead of concentrating on how many calories you are working off, focus on the pure joy of movement and how it makes you feel.

10. Honor Your Health

With your newfound freedom around food you'll find yourself with a lot of choices to make. Pay attention to how different foods affect how you feel, and make your food choices based on what makes you feel healthy — both physically and emotionally. If sugar makes you sluggish, do without. But if you need that milk chocolate for sanity's sake, go ahead. When it comes to attuned eating, a moderate attitude is vital.

to that vanilla swirl with rainbow sprinkles for weeks in advance, and she'll sit and eat it with gusto. But once she's had enough, the remainder loses its appeal; she'll let it melt and go play with something more interesting.

We were all born with the instinct to be okay leaving our precious ice cream melting into a puddle. You, too, have the ability to enjoy any food you want and keep your body happy and healthy. So why do you feel like, if left on your own, you would spend your days eating cake batter and cookie dough?

That's the effect of all the diet programs we've been bombarded with. In *Feeding the Hungry Heart*, Geneen Roth backs up this claim: “Diets can't work. They create in you the desire for what you can't have. If you weren't obsessed with food before you dieted, you are by the time you finish.” By making certain foods forbidden, diets also make them more desirable. Have you ever, for instance, gone on a low-carb diet and after a day all you wanted was a loaf of bread? Or if you give up sugar, sweets seem to call your name?

Diets don't just make food seem more desirable, they also make food a source of guilt. If you break your diet even a tiny bit, suddenly you want to eat everything — quickly — before you have to start a new one again. “Often people think they are compulsive eaters, but in truth they are eating only because they ate!” says Elyse Resch, referring to the absurd logic dieters often use when they eat a forbidden sliver of cake and feel that they may as well finish the whole thing since they already messed up.

With intuitive eating, no food is illegal, so there is no guilt or accompanying binge following a high-calorie indulgence. In *Feeding the Hungry Heart*, Geneen Roth writes: “When you are no longer depriving it [your body] by dieting, there is no push to devour everything but the dining room table. Food becomes your friend... You become your friend.”

If you still have misgivings about tossing your diet books in the trash, review your dieting history to see if it has ever worked for you. “Take a look at the success you've had on past diets,” says Elyse Resch. “Statistics show that at least 95% of people on diets regain the weight, and two-thirds of them gain even more weight afterward.”

Rediscovering Intuitive Eating

Leaving your food choices in your own hands can be frightening, especially when everyone around you is dieting. With her experience counseling members of the *frum* community, Elyse Resch points out that many women feel pressure to be on a diet, and to be very thin.

“It's hard to ignore that pressure,” she says, but urges women to break free from their unhealthy relationships to food, if not for their own sake, for the sake of their children. Having counseled many women with eating disorders, Ms. Resch notes that a mother's attitude towards food is often transmitted to her daughter. “We have a responsibility to teach our girls a healthy way of relating to food,” she says. “They will

Nourish Yourself Without Food

“You can use the desire to eat when you are not hungry as an indicator that you need something less material than food...until you stop eating you cannot discover what that might be,” writes Geneen Roth in *Breaking Free From Compulsive Eating*.

It may be an easy and delicious time-out, but if you use food to fill an emotional hunger, you'll never be satiated. “Discover new coping mechanisms you can use instead of food to distract or soothe yourself,” says Elyse Resch. Some strategies she has advised her clients to use: write a song, hug a friend, take a bath, talk on the phone or dance with the door closed! Pick a coping method that will help you deal with your emotions as well as nurture yourself in a healthy way.

always pick up on unhealthy behaviors.”

Intuitive eating will only work if you devote yourself fully to it. “If you allow even one small hope to linger that a new and better diet might be lurking around the corner, it will prevent you from being free to rediscover intuitive eating,” write Resch and Tribole. Leaving dieting behind can be scary, but a never-ending fight against food and your body is a whole lot more terrifying. **B**

Reference to any programs or books in this article does not imply endorsement of such.

Intuitive Exercise

Diet and exercise go hand in hand; just like diets take the fun out of eating, a requirement to exercise takes the fun out of being active. Our bodies naturally love to move — look at how kids choose to get their heart racing with games like tag or jump rope. Do an activity you love; it doesn't have to leave you sore the next day or collapsed from overexertion.

Elyse Resch, who refers to exercise as “movement,” advises finding a movement that feels good, like taking a walk with friends, hiking, dancing to upbeat music, ballet, or stretching. “Do it for joy, strength, vitality, endorphin release. Do it for every reason other than weight,” says Elyse Resch, “otherwise you'll throw in the towel when it gets uncomfortable.”