

# Intuitive Eating and Cancer Survivorship

Presented by:

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Amber provides 1:1 online nutrition coaching to men and women who have faced a cancer diagnosis and want to:

- set and achieve goals for nourishment and healing during and after treatment
- use compassionate mindset work to reduce food fears and gain confidence in their nutrition after treatment

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Cancer Services

January 13, 2021



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The content is not intended to substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have about your medical condition.

## Key Points to Cover

- ✓ What is Intuitive Eating and how can it help you
- ✓ The 10 principles of Intuitive Eating + pros and cons
- ✓ Examples of using Intuitive Eating to stay nourished

# What is Intuitive Eating?

“

Intuitive Eating is a dynamic mind-body integration of instinct, emotion, and rational thought.

It is a personal process of honoring your health by paying attention to the messages of your body, and meeting your physical and emotional needs.

- The Intuitive Eating Workbook by E. Tribole MS RDN and E. Resch MS RDN

”



# How can Intuitive Eating help me?

## During cancer treatment

Release the pressure of eating a certain way and allow all foods

Focus on how you feel (what sounds good/what you can tolerate) and how foods make you feel

Eat as an act of self-care

## After cancer treatment

Allow for all foods you tolerate

Make peace with foods you may not tolerate yet, or may not tolerate for a while

Explore food satisfaction

Experiment with your *why* related to food





# Reject the diet mentality

## During Treatment

Diet (*verb*) restrict oneself to small amounts or special kinds of food in order to lose weight.

### I can't eat this...

Restrictions may be tied directly to fear of cancer recurrence. Limiting foods may:

- decrease the amount of foods available during treatment
- interfere with maintaining weight, strength, and tolerating treatment

## During Treatment

Thinking of food as medicine can backfire

### I have to eat this...

Focusing on and eating only certain foods during treatment can:

- decrease the amount of foods available during treatment
- interfere with maintaining weight
- become challenging when the food is not tolerated



# 1 Reject the diet mentality

## During cancer treatment

Attempt to maintain your current weight, whatever that weight may be.

“ Weight loss of as little as 6% [during treatment] has been associated with reduced response to oncology treatment, reduced survival and reduced quality of life. 1 ”

## After treatment

Restrictive eating can interfere with healing, plus dieting contributes to:

- body dissatisfaction
- food and body preoccupation
- food cravings
- distraction from other health goals
- reduced self-esteem
- weight stigmatization and discrimination<sup>2</sup>



# 2

## Honor your hunger

### *During treatment*

This principle may not be helpful if you are:

- on a treatment that affects your appetite
- have physical changes (surgery) that affect your appetite

Instead, honor your body's biological needs by:

- eating every 3-4 hours
- eating without hunger cues

### *After treatment*

If you are aware of your hunger signals, and you feel (and honor) those signals routinely, you can:

- interrupt patterns of restrict/binge
- improve overall energy

If hunger signals are hard to find or not routine, continue to:

- eat every 3-4 hours
- honor your biological needs



# 3

## Make peace with food

### *During treatment*

This principle can help you stay nourished, by giving yourself permission to eat what you can

- all foods are allowed
- focus on foods that align with how you feel and what you can tolerate

### *After treatment*

This principle can help you heal after treatment, and allow foods to become neutral

- choose foods for satisfaction
- release fears around foods
- choose foods that make your body feel good





## Challenge the food police

### *During Treatment*

This principle can help you stay nourished during treatment by:

- releasing judgement around food choices
- choose foods you tolerate
- release food labels that lead to guilt and negative self-talk
- choose foods that make your body feel good

### *After treatment*

This principle can help you heal and examine negative self-talk around food:

- how you talk to yourself about food choices matters
- do you feel guilty or want to act out based on your inner dialogue?





# 5

## Feel your fullness

### *During treatment*

This principle may not be helpful if you:

- feel full quickly
- feel fullness much of the time from bloating or other treatment/tumor side effects

Instead, you can honor your body's biological needs by:

- experimenting with how you feel eating with fullness present
- eating with self-care in mind by eating smaller amounts more frequently

### *After treatment*

Do you have any lasting side effects that:

- affect your fullness sensation
- limit you from eating enough to maintain your weight and strength

If so, continue to honor your body's biological needs by:

- experimenting with how you feel eating with fullness present
- eating with self-care in mind by eating smaller amounts more frequently



# 6

## Discover the satisfaction factor

### During treatment

This principle may not be helpful if you:

- have treatment side effects that make it hard to enjoy food. This may include taste changes and mouth sores
- aren't experiencing hunger signals

Can you explore other sensations of satisfaction other than taste?

- what temperature is most appealing
- does the food appear appetizing
- what texture feels the best

### After treatment

You may be able to focus on satisfaction when:

- treatment side effects improve
- you can ask yourself what truly sounds good and explore that

Can you begin to explore other factors that affect satisfaction, like:

- temperature
- texture
- eye appeal



# 7

## Cope with your emotions with kindness

### During Treatment

Food restriction (intentional or unintentional) triggers both biological and psychological responses. You may:

- think more about food
- want "comfort foods"

What do you feel about your cancer diagnosis. Those emotions are felt physically in the body. How do you experience:

- stress and anxiety
- anger
- what's your relationship to food

### After Treatment

After certain treatments, your body may continue to need more energy to heal. Explore these questions:

- what kindness can I show my healing body today. How can food be a part of that?
- food as a coping mechanism tool is normal

Questions to ask:

- have you eaten enough today?
- check in with your feelings. What other tools do you have to help?



# 8

## Respect your body

### During Treatment

Our culture places thin bodies as the ideal. It's common to think of cancer treatment as a silver lining for weight loss. But keep in mind that significant weight loss can:

- cause delays during radiation treatment from replanning
- lead to treatment dose reduction or holding treatment
- increase treatment toxicity

### After Treatment

Your body:

- deserves to be fed
- deserves to be treated with dignity
- is your ally

Do you believe you are at war with your body? How does that make you feel about caring for and respecting your needs?





## Respect your body

### The BMI

The Body Mass Index:

- was developed over 200 years ago by a mathematician
- never intended to be used on individuals
- not an indicator of health

Weight stigma is an independent risk factor for many health problems, including:

- increased blood pressure
- inflammation
- metabolic syndrome
- type 2 diabetes <sup>3,4,5</sup>



# 9

## Movement - feel the difference

### During Treatment

Consistent movement can help:

- lessen fatigue
- maintain muscle strength
- lessen anxiety
- improve quality of life <sup>6</sup>

Barriers can exist, such as:

- side effects from treatment
- surgical wounds limiting abilities
- economic status and access

### After treatment

If and when you are able, find a movement practice you:

- enjoy
- can afford/have access to
- feels good

Uncouple exercise from weight loss. Remind yourself that physical activity can instead increase:

- bone strength
- stress tolerance
- mood



# 10

## Honor your health with gentle nutrition

### During Treatment

Consider that:

- you may need to eat more than usual to support your weight and strength
- you may be asked to focus on certain foods or nutrients to help your body

Both of these may interfere with you listening to your body.

### After Treatment

The gentle nutrition approach (involving taste and nutrition) is more helpful once you:

- make peace with foods
- remove the pressure of eating *just right*
- make progress with body respect

Eating in a healthful way should feel good, both physically and mentally, and result in a satisfying experience.



# 10

## Honor your health with gentle nutrition

*When you are ready, gentle nutrition can look like:*

- eating more fruits and veg
- eating enough grains, and choosing whole grains half of the time
- adding fish into your eating patterns
- staying hydrated, mostly with water
- adding in foods for taste and satisfaction

Eating in a healthful way should feel good, both physically and mentally, and result in a satisfying experience.





# Take Away Thoughts

- ✓ All foods are morally equal
- ✓ Tune into how your body feels during and after meals and snacks. How do you want to feel? What types of foods may support that? Get curious and experiment! Everyone is different!
- ✓ You are the expert of your body. Only YOU know how certain foods feel, or how you experience hunger and fullness.

*Keep in mind The following:*

- ✓ there is no perfect anti-cancer diet
- ✓ allowing yourself to heal from all-or-none, restrictive eating patterns can help you tune into your body
- ✓ flexibility with eating, along with compassion for your body, can help you find balance in your choices



# Research, Resources, and Articles Mentioned

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Amber Thomas is a dietitian and nutrition therapist who specializes in cancer nutrition and intuitive eating.

Learn how to separate guilt and shame from food, improve your eating confidence, and transform how you feel about food and your body after a cancer diagnosis.

## Connect with me!



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