

## Intuitive Eating —The Magic of Knowing

By Barbara Birsinger, MPH, RD

Petaluma, CA — What would it be like to never have to think about what you eat or control your weight again? That is exactly what *intuitive eating* is all about.

Young children are great examples of intuitive eaters —they eat only when they are hungry, only what they want, and only the amount that they are hungry for in that moment. A recent study on children's eating habits, conducted by Pennsylvania State University psychologist Leann Birch, has shown again as in previous decades of research, that when young children are given a wide variety of foods, and are given free rein to choose what they want, they systematically choose a balanced diet. Children instinctively self regulate. "They eat exactly what their bodies need for health and growth, though not likely in a single meal, but averaged over several days. It is innate.

The practice in our culture of telling children what, when and how much to eat, results in many growing up disconnected from their bodies and no longer trusting themselves with food. It is no wonder that so many adults and teens today have forgotten the simple, subtle gift we were born with, and believe in the illusion that our bodies should be ignored and our eating controlled. We have lost trust in our own true nature.

As adults or teens, how do we restore this trust and reconnect with the wisdom of intuitive eating?

Becoming an intuitive eater takes time, patience and practice, as well as a willingness to face our fears about letting go of control. It takes

having compassion for ourselves, and a willingness to fail, as this is a natural process, not a right or wrong way. And it takes making a leap of faith in the belief that we are innately capable.

Change is not an easy road to travel. I deal with clients every day who feel that it is an impossible task to change their eating behaviors or habitual negative thoughts and beliefs about their bodies. But it can be done. They discover that when they consistently practice the fine art of remembering —as one client refers to it —to be still, to be in the present moment and to listen to the advice from their own body, a transformation happens that opens the door to lasting change.

Intuitive eaters can naturally discern between stomach (physical) hunger, and symbolic (emotional, psychological or spiritual) hunger. An attuned eater will eat at the first signs of stomach hunger, knowing exactly what and how much the body is asking for at that time. Most of us can relate to what it feels like after we eat too much or we eat something that doesn't sit well with us. How would your food choices be different if you got that sensation before you ate?

Giving yourself full permission to eat whatever it is that you want — mindfully and without judgment — is also an important aspect of intuitive eating. Contrary to what we may have been taught, food is not morally good or bad, nor is there such a thing as a fattening food; it is just food. The frequency and amounts we eat of particular foods make up a healthy or unhealthy diet, which is individual, not universal.

Judging and criticizing blocks intuition and can lead us back into unhealthy eating. If you are just coming off of a diet, or have done a lot of restricting, you might crave your previously forbidden or illegal foods. By staying connected with your body, you will discover that those foods lose their appeal and you no longer overeat them.

Your body wants, and will guide you to eat, exactly what is right for you. No one else can give you that knowledge. It is uniquely yours. Intuitive eating comes from self discovery, and that is the closest thing to magic anyone has ever found.

For more information on this subject, visit the website: [www.BarbaraBirsinger.com](http://www.BarbaraBirsinger.com), or contact the author at (888) 243-9582 or email: [research@barbarabirsinger.com](mailto:research@barbarabirsinger.com)

Barbara Birsinger, MPH, RD is in private practice in the San Francisco Bay Area and consults with groups and individuals in the *Energetics of Eating™*, *Conversations with Bod™*, and in *Intuitive Eating and Natural Weight™*. She is currently a candidate for a doctoral degree in *Spiritual Healing and Energy Medicine*.