

# IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

## FITNESS FLYER

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Often times we wonder “what to eat?” when it comes to being healthy, when in fact we can start improving our health by making little changes in the habits that surround eating. What do I mean by this? By bringing awareness to our habits before a meal, during a meal, and at the end of our meal, we can start being healthier now, before we even start changing what is on the plate. Here are 3 little things you can start doing today.

### 1. Notice when you are getting hungry

Your body has a ton of information to tell you if you are willing to listen to it. I'm certain that you've all felt hunger pangs, but have you ever really stopped to think about what your body is telling you and why? Next time you start to feel hungry, recognize what is actually happening in your body. Try to notice your hunger as soon as possible and use these as signs to prompt immediate action. Typically, we wait too long after the hunger signs come and before we know it, we are ready to devour everything in sight. The common result is that we end up overeating.

So, what does your body do when it knows it needs to eat? Does that little part of your stomach start to gurgle? Do you start to get lightheaded? Maybe you know you're going to be hungry every few hours? Whatever is unique to you, realize it and plan to get something in you soon.

A great practice is to scale your level of hunger from 1-10. If you plan to eat when you are between levels 2-4, you'll make better decisions about what (and how much) you choose to eat.

### 2. Make your meals last longer

We live in an on-the-go society that usually results in us scarfing down our food, leaving us feeling hungry even after we've probably eaten enough food. When you eat quickly, your stomach doesn't have time to tell your brain that you've been satisfied and are now on the verge of overeating. The longer you can extend your meal, the easier it will be for your brain to know when you are satisfied and keep your portions and cravings under control. There are several simple things that you can do to slow your meal and start reaping the benefits of less rushed eating.

Start small: If you normally eat your entire meal in 5 minutes, try to extend that to 7 minutes this week, 10 minutes next week and

so on. Try to incorporate small behaviors like taking a breath in between each bite or putting the fork down 3 times within your meal. If you are at a restaurant, utilize all of your senses while you eat – how the food looks, how it smells, how it tastes, etc. These little conscious acts of periodically stopping within your meal helps you slow down and lets your body properly digest the food, absorb nutrients better, and reduce bloating and overeating.

### 3. Notice when you are full

This is the other side of the equation. Portion control is definitely a concept that not everyone grasps. In this country, restaurants, food manufacturers and even supermarkets widely ignore the idea. Because of this, we tend to load our plates or have meals with way more food than our bodies actually need. Similar to the hunger scale mentioned earlier, you can use a fullness scale. If you scale your fullness from 1-10 and stop eating when you are between levels 7-8, you'll never walk away from the table feeling nauseous – just satisfied.

If you are finished eating and there is still food on the plate in front of you, make a physical gesture by pushing your plate away, putting a napkin over it or crossing your silverware. If you are with others, declare out loud that you are full. It's just a little mental trick, but it works because you've already announced the meal was complete for you. If you're out and there is leftover food that you want to take home, have the waiter bring you a box as soon as you are done – even if others with you are not finished yet – so you aren't lured back in to eating.

In many cases, it's not what you are eating that makes you unhealthy, but rather the amounts of those things and the time you spend eating. Next time you find yourself eating an entire pint of ice cream, realize the damage you're doing and try some of my suggestions. Bringing awareness to your eating habits reduces the chances of overeating and your feelings of guilt, stress, and regret. Incorporating these little things into your normal habits when you eat improves your health now and will help you tackle bigger things next, like what's actually on your plate. Good luck – you've totally got this.



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