



# The Joy of Eating: Becoming a Competent Eater

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Eating Competence is being positive, comfortable, and flexible with eating as well as matter-of-fact and reliable about getting enough to eat of enjoyable food. Even though they don't worry about what and how much to eat, Competent Eaters do better nutritionally, are more active, sleep better and have better medical tests. They are more self-aware and self-accepting, not only with food, but in all ways. To be a Competent Eater, be relaxed, self-trusting and joyful about eating, and take good care of yourself with food.

## Feed yourself faithfully

Reassure yourself you will be fed. Structure is the supportive framework for taking care of yourself with food.

- Take time to eat.
- Develop a meal and snack routine that works for *you*.
- Include foods you truly enjoy, not just eat foods because you think you “should.”
- Make eating times pleasant. Relax. Pay attention. Take your time.
- Experiment with new food when you are ready.

## Give yourself permission to eat

Reassure yourself: “It’s all right to eat. I just need to sit down and enjoy.”

- Eat *what* you want. Your body needs variety and your soul needs pleasure.
- Eat as much as you want. Your body knows how much it needs to eat.
- Go to meals and snacks hungry (not starved) and eat until you truly feel like stopping.
- Pay attention to your food. Taste it! Enjoy it!
- Eat it if it tastes good; don’t if it doesn’t!

## Notice as you learn and grow

Becoming a Competent Eater is a process, and it takes time. As you combine structure with giving yourself permission to eat, you will find your eating falling into place.

- You feel good about your eating and are reliable about seeing to it that you get fed.
- You get better and better at eating as much as you are hungry for.
- As you include “forbidden foods” at meals and snacks, they become ordinary foods you can eat in ordinary ways
- Without forcing yourself to eat fruits and vegetables you learn which ones you like best and add them to meals and snacks to eat for pleasure and enjoyment.
- Bigger servings do not lead to overeating. You can eat it all if you choose, or leave some on the plate when you notice you have had enough.