

## Hunger and Fullness Continuum

After toddlerhood, when eating and appetite are most natural, determining hunger and fullness can become complicated. While it is extremely important to listen to internal cues for hunger and satiety, social factors, previous experiences with foods, and environmental cues often override the internal ability to eat when hungry and stop when full.

For individuals who need to relearn how to monitor feelings of satiety, a scale can help to impart perspective. This tool is especially helpful for those recovering from an eating disorder, where internal cues were dramatically overridden.

On a scale from 0 to 10: 0=an empty gas tank and 10=filled to the brim.

- 0:** You are wobbly and dizzy. Thoughts are unclear. Most people have to go all day without food to get close to becoming a 1. At 0, you are weak and tired.
- 1:** You are still very hungry. You are irritable, cranky, and lethargic.
- 2:** You are very hungry, on the verge of having a “starving” feeling.
- 3:** You could definitely eat, but you are not on the verge of collapse. The urge to eat is strong.
- 4:** You are truly hungry. You are looking forward to eating more.
- 5:** You are only a little hungry. Your body is sending messages that you might want to eat.
- 6:** You are a notch past being neutral. You could definitely eat more.
- 7:** You are feeling more satisfied, getting full. If you stopped here, you would need to eat again in 4-4½ hours.
- 8:** You are quite satisfied, full in fact. If you stopped eating here, this would sustain you for 5-6 hours.
- 9:** You are becoming uncomfortable. You could force down another three bites, although your body no longer wants anything.
- 10:** Your body is screaming “get me out of here!” You have no pleasure in eating anymore. If you ate any more, you feel you would explode.

While it sometimes is challenging in the beginning to figure out where you fall on this scale, it will get easier over time. As recovery progresses, feelings of hunger and fullness will become clearer than at first. However, normal feelings of hunger and fullness still are closely tied to eating disordered thoughts and feelings.

**Reference**

Schwartz B. *Diets Don't Work*. Houston, TX: Breakthrough Publishing; 1996.

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