



HEALTH AND FITNESS

By Marie Stryjak

Lessons from a 6 year old

My 6 year old granddaughter is smarter about eating than most people I know. She will look at food in a skeptical way – touching it with her fork, smelling it, tentatively tasting a little before she decides if it's worth the trouble to eat. And when she's bored with the taste of it, or feeling like she's had enough, she'll push her plate away. She isn't that interested in eating once she's had her fill.

For her, there are more important, fun, and exciting things to do in life than eat.

For many of us, eating is less about being hungry and more about emotion. Over many years, we've conditioned ourselves that when we feel stressed, we eat. When we are bored, we eat. When we are in the company of food and others, we eat. Never mind that we might not feel hungry, or that the first piece of pumpkin pie tastes no different than the second one. We have created an automatic behavior, like getting that cup of coffee in the morning or wanting something sweet after a meal.

We are eating on auto-pilot.

New research shows that those who are aware of why they eat, have a healthier body weight and less trouble with weight gain than those who don't. They eat to satisfy hunger and not to satisfy an emotional need. We all know someone who we think has great "self control" when it comes to food. Maybe it's not really will-power, but that they are just better at listening to their internal hunger cues and paying attention to why they are eating.

With holiday season approaching, it's easier than ever to go into "auto pilot" and gobble more than we need to just because it's there. Before you set this course, and face days of feeling bloated, lethargic and uncomfortable, slow down and ask yourself a few questions first.

Are you really hungry? If your stomach is grumbling or you feel low on energy, it's probably time to have something to eat. If you feel fine, and you're just having an emotional craving, find some other activity to focus on until you are actually hungry.

Eat slowly.... and then slow down some more. It takes 20 minutes for your brain to recognize that you are full. Most of us are done a meal and heading for more before that time is even up.

Eat mindfully... think like a 6 year old. Does it taste good enough to finish? Is the flavor, texture and smell enjoyable? Are you getting satisfaction from what you are eating or just eating because it's there?

Focus outside of the meal... consider eating like someone who doesn't view food as the only part of the celebration. Decide that you will find pleasure in your holidays in a broader way. Enjoy the company, the cheerfulness, the conversation and look at the meal as a compliment to all that and not the main event.

Dieting can leave you obsessed with food and feeling deprived. The opposite, eating "all out" during the holidays can change your festive mood into an uncomfortable one and leave you tired and frustrated with yourself. The way you think about food and your relationship with it, really is the key to a life long healthy weight.

So, turn off that auto-pilot. Channel that picky 6 year old inside you. Be aware of why you're eating. Make your holidays more about celebrating family, friends and good times and less about where to catch that nap or how far your pants will stretch. Your self esteem and your body will be thankful for it!

Marie Stryjak is a Certified Holistic Health Counselor and Personal Trainer at Cornerstone New Hope. Individual counseling and Group Nutrition Classes are available. For more information, please contact her at 215.862.2200 or visit www.cornerstoneclubs.com