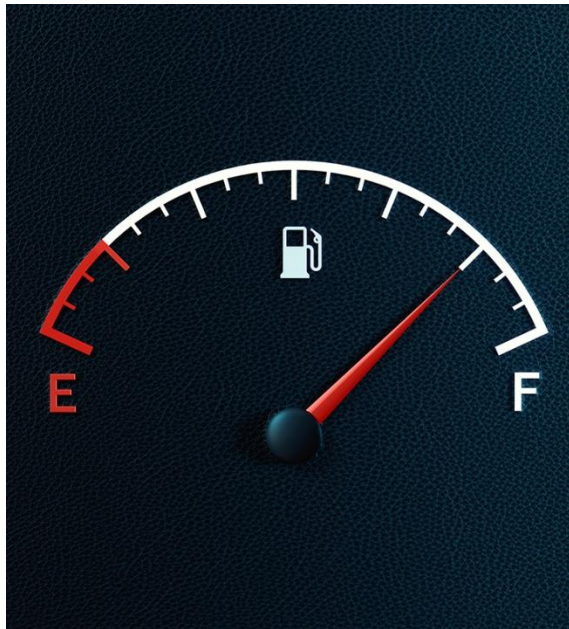


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Counting calories is old-school

In last month's column (Dec 2021), we took a humorous look at "calories." With this article, we'll take a closer but more serious look at counting calories, especially if you are tired of doing that. Actually, your intuition is far more accurate at determining your energy needs because your body has a built-in calorie counter: Hunger.



Your hunger signals can be compared to a car's gas gauge. Your body knows when it needs fuel (food) and when it's full. You won't gain excess weight if you listen to your body and never ignore hunger signals.

Naturally slender people usually eat only when their stomach sends hunger pangs (or if they feel hunger in other ways, like light-headedness or sudden fatigue). They intuitively know when their body needs fuel and when it's had enough. Thin people won't eat if they don't feel like it – even if they see and smell food – and they know to stop eating when they're full. And that's a significant factor behind why they never seem to gain

excess weight. It's the consistent non-hunger eating that packs on the pounds!

Unfortunately, we can lose our born instinct and our discipline to acknowledge when we are hungry and when we are full. Instead, we develop habits like eating when the clock tells us it's time to eat or being forced to clean our plate as children. And society's perception of appearance teaches us to ignore our hunger and stick to a diet.

However, ignoring hunger signals won't help you lose weight and keep it off. Instead, it can make you more efficient at storing body fat and less efficient at utilizing it.

When your body signals hunger, it's telling you it needs fuel (food) for energy. But if you don't give it any, it senses a state of "famine." If this happens too often, the body eventually learns to hang on to body fat because fat is the preferred long-term fuel source. This is a genetic defense mechanism we all have. It was once necessary for survival – when food was often scarce.

However, with today's food availability, this defense system is no longer necessary. But there's no way to shut it off. This survival trait is one of the causes of binges and the repetitive weight gain/loss cycle. And it's the major reason why diets don't work – because calorie restriction creates hunger.

Attuned eaters eat when hungry and stop when satisfied *most of the time*. Even though they may occasionally eat when not hungry or overeat at times, they usually do not eat again until hungry. Their bodies automatically balance out their calories in this way, and they don't gain weight.

Be prepared for unexpected hunger signals by preparing healthy foods ahead of time and arranging take-along snacks. Choose to eat as healthfully as possible to ensure your body receives all the nutrients it needs to sustain life.

Listen to your body. Eat only when hungry and stop when you are full. This may help you develop the habits of naturally thin people. If you need assistance with *Intuitive Eating*, consult a Registered Dietitian (RD): [Find a Dietitian Directory DOC](#)

Eve Lees has been active in the health & fitness industry since 1979. Now retired, she was a Freelance Health Writer for several publications and gave speaking presentations to business and private groups on various health topics. <https://www.artnews-healthnews.com/health-writing>

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