

An alternative take on intuitive eating?

Although the phrase 'intuitive eating' was coined by dieticians Tribole & Resche in 1995, the concept of intuitive eating has been present for some time. For example psychologist John Bowlby who explored the theory of attachment, noted that babies would naturally feed when they were hungry and refuse food when they were full. From his perspective it appeared that an infant's natural intuitive understanding of satiety and hunger could start to become confused dependant on the relationship with the care giver/parent. For example, whether a parent is anxious around feeding, or pulls away, or has complexed feelings themselves around food. A certain appearance of autonomy manifests when a toddler starts self-feeding, but nevertheless the network of relationships: childcare, nurseries and parenting becomes enmeshed within their formation of habits and behaviours, from their food choices to their habits. Fast forward to the complexity of societal perceptions of body image, particularly for women, and our relationship with food can become even more fraught and difficult, one which we seek to control.

Therefore, whilst there is an existing assessment and stepped approach as outlined within Tribole & Resche's model, I would seek to work in a deeper, yet unstructured way to re-establish my client's natural approach to food and feeding. This is more reminiscent of the psychologist Donald Winnicott's idea of congruence and spontaneity – but applied to nutrition. The benefits being clients can repair their relationship with food and remember how to enjoy the experience and grow in confidence. Long term sustained change being the goal, not yo-yo dieting or stuck negative thinking patterns around food or body image.

How can I start to eat intuitively?

Adopting intuitive eating is a means to reconnect with a more congruent and playful relationship with food. One where you recognise when you're hungry and understand when you're full. This intuitive eating approach is particularly helpful for clients who have experienced diet culture that has been unhelpful, or find they can oscillate between being too focussed on food or indeed forgetful of food. When working with clients keen to re-express a natural relationship with food it may be necessary in the first instance to identify what doesn't work, and what has happened to create issues around food in the first place. It is only by understanding the

enmeshed nature of food within relationships and habits that we can work to disable unhelpful patterns of behaviour and identify what intuitive eating means for the client in their personal lives.

If its intuitive, I shouldn't have to cultivate habits right?

Imagine a scenario where you've been asked to stay late at work. You come home and although there's various ingredients in the fridge, you haven't got the energy to cook. An email pops up reminding you of 10% off Just eat and before you know it, you've unwrapped your burger and chips in front of the TV and washed it down with a bottle of wine. Is this intuitive? Its spontaneous, sure and you've answered your hunger signals, because you were hungry. Very. Yet habits provide structure and still have a place in intuitive eating. The word intuition describes understanding something instinctively without the need for conscious reasoning, therefore instinctively one would know that a hangover is something to be avoided, and the burger and chip combination hasn't worked for you in the past. Instinctual self care would negate poorer food choices.

If one thinks about how we learn things and create habits, there is often a process referred to, a common learning model, that moves from:- unconscious incompetence, to conscious incompetence, to conscious competence and finally to unconscious competence. When we have habits that sit in that last place unconscious competence, we no longer have to think about our good habits, but just do them without thinking. So if you establish a good habit, such as meal preparation, then when you come back late from work, there could be pre-prepared nutritious meal waiting in the freezer or fridge that simply needs heating up. Or even if there isn't and you do call in a takeaway, you may instinctively choose vegetable rolls, a chicken noodle soup with edame bean side. The bottle of wine becomes a glass, and you are sitting there comfortably, recognising the feelings of satiety and able to stop, without a nasty food and drink hangover waiting for you the next day.

Remember we create things twice in life – once in imagination and once in reality. So imagine what could work for you? Book an appointment and we can harness your creativity to embed the good habits necessary to allow you to relax sustainably into an intuitive eating style.