

Relationship with Food

Why do we eat?

Because we are hungry or thirsty? Because our body needs more energy or fluid? These are 'physiological needs'. Or, for other reasons?..... our eating habits have changed.

There are lots of reasons why we eat. Some of them can cause us to choose foods that are not good for us:

Heart Hunger – or emotional eating, using food to comfort us if we feel lonely, bored, sad, happy, angry, tired

Head Hunger – external triggers for us to eat may be sight/smell/look of food. Adverts, marketing and the availability of food may trigger our appetites such as sweets at the till, 4 takeaways on one street, other people eating in front of you. I've seen it, smelt it now I want it, but you might not need it...

Habit – social occasions, Eid, Christmas, Birthdays (cake), cinema (popcorn), weekend treats (sweets), we have always had a supper, always had pizza on a Friday.

Family and friends – if they are eating it makes you want it, encouragement to eat or clear your plate even if you are not hungry. You may not wish to cause offence or make a fuss by refusing or ask for a healthier alternative.

How often do we just 'do' what others are doing/what we have always done because it's easier and because we haven't really thought about doing it any different? We need to get better at challenging ourselves, being self-aware, getting the balance right and distinguishing between:

- **Hunger** – the physical response caused by the body's need for/lack of calories, what we need
- **Appetite** – the desire for/or enjoyment of food, what we want

What is a healthy relationship with food?

Balance and flexibility- we listen to our bodies hunger signs and choose fresh foods that nourish and protect us most of the time. We must enjoy our food and celebrate it. When we eat foods that are less nutritious, we should enjoy them, watch the portion size and frequency but not feel guilty.

Following the Eatwell Guide is a good way of ensuring a healthy balanced diet for everyone.

If we want our children to have a healthy relationship with food, now, and as adults, parent/carers must understand their own relationship with food and how they are instructing and influencing their children.

This is especially important when managing diabetes, it is hard to manage food and mealtimes if there are strict rules/no rules for some in the family but not for others. It is much easier to manage diabetes if the whole family follows the same food messages and much more encouraging for the child/young person with diabetes.

As a parent/carer of a child with diabetes, you will obviously worry about what is eaten and when, especially when they move to high school and become more independent. However, if the whole family has a healthy relationship with food, your child is more likely to have confidence to make healthier choices that help manage their own diabetes as they grow into young adults.

Talk about foods that you can eat plentifully rather than concentrate on the foods that are better eaten less often. Try to be positive in your language. When your child asks for something sweet between meals instead of saying no try changing it to you can have it on Friday or have it after tea tomorrow.

‘Feelings are at the heart of all behaviour’

If an adult understands their own relationship with food, it is easier to empathise with some of the feelings a child with diabetes may have and therefore manage their behaviour.

Thought: how may your child feel about having to change their diet?

Could they feel?

- sad
- angry
- frustrated
- different (from their peers)
- guilty (for eating sweet foods)
- all the enjoyment of mealtimes and social occasions has been taken from them and everything revolves around their diabetes
- bored (eating healthily all the time)

Because of these feelings, how may they behave?

- sneak/steal food (especially ones they feel they 'cannot' have)
- constantly snacking
- eat foods they know will make their BG high
- overeat or under eat
- skip meals
- be defiant
- withdrawn (maybe from social occasions where food is involved)

Eating a healthy balanced diet is hard work for most of us, when you throw diabetes into the pot, it can make it even harder and more stressful.

A simple guide to help you get starting with a more positive relationship with food

Healthy eating patterns	Not so healthy eating patterns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eating regularly (diabetes likes routine)• Eat breakfast• No distractions – phones, TV, toys etc• Eat when hungry – stop when full up• Avoid eating because of external triggers or emotions• Plan meals• Try to sit at a table, socialise and eat slower (enjoy your meals)• Eating fresh fruit and veg at each meal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grazing all day• Going for long periods without eating anything• Eating when full up• Emotional eating• Eating with distractions• Using food as rewards (this means we associate food with making us feel 'better')• Not eating fresh fruit and veg

Parenting styles

Parenting is a difficult job that is challenged more when managing a long term condition. The following table shows the 4 main different parenting styles and how a child responds. We may fluctuate between these styles of parenting but should try to aim for the authoritative style the majority of the time because this style leads to a child leading a healthier lifestyle now and as an adult.

Parenting style	Child may feel	Child may behave
Authoritative (responsive and in charge) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respects child’s opinion ‘let’s talk about it’ • Warmth • Assertive • Clear standards and boundaries 	Safe Happy Loved Confident	Empowered Motivated Compliant Engaged
Authoritarian/Dictatorial (in charge but not responsive to child’s needs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In charge • Highly controlling • Strict boundaries and rules • Strict/bully/blame • Not listening to child’s desires or feelings, limited warmth 	Anxious Like a failure, Never good enough Nervous	Quiet/withdrawn Submissive Risk taking Sneaky Attention seeking
Indulgent (not in charge and highly responsive) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No limits or boundaries • Avoids confrontation • Very lenient • Wants to make the child happy • Doesn’t want to upset the child • Letting them eat what they want 	Powerful Confused Lonely Insecure	Selfish Spoilt Bossy Clingy Attention seeking Demanding Un-cooperative Argumentative
Neglectful (not in charge or caring for needs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No control • Distant • Uninterested, chaotic • Passive • Neglectful, not providing food • Letting them eat what they want 	Sad Depressed Confused Rejected Low self - esteem	Withdrawn Aggressive Hostile Clingy Attention seeking

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