

The E in PLEASE – eating to support emotion regulation

#1: Eat enough!

1. **Eating enough is priority #1** because it is the most important thing to give your brain and body the energy to operate without having to compensate for the extra strain of lack of fuel. The brain consistently uses 20% of the energy you consume (Raichle & Gusnard, 2002), which is huge given its size compared to the rest of the body. Adequate and consistent fuel is particularly crucial for complex tasks like learning and regulation of emotions.
2. **What is “enough”** varies from day to day and is different for each person, and is independent of weight or body size. Possible signs of not eating enough – identify what your signs are:
 - having intrusive thoughts about food in between meal or snack times
 - getting hungry again soon after eating (e.g., within 1 hour)
 - frequently having urges to eat more after deciding you are finished with meals
 - often feeling hangry before mealtimes, especially later in the day
 - Other: _____
3. **High stress and strong emotions** often impact appetite (interest in eating) and hunger/fullness cues.
 - Sometimes, high stress or emotion can make us feel uninterested in eating and/or interfere with feeling hunger cues.
 - Other times, high stress can increase our interest in eating and make it hard to feel satisfied.

At these times, continuing with eating enough and eating at regular times throughout the day is very important. Sometimes this requires having “go-to” foods or eating in a mechanical way, in order to get adequate nourishment.

4. **Access:** Many people have inconsistent access to food, which is a barrier to being able eat “enough” food.

#2: Additional guidelines for reducing vulnerabilities:

- **Regular eating:** Eat regularly, approximately every 3 to 4 hours
 - Similar to the way sleep is improved with keeping time of going to bed and waking up consistent, setting discrete and consistent meal and snack times helps to regulate the body, reducing how often our bodies become dysregulated (overly hungry, overly full) and thus more vulnerable to emotions. In short, the brain and body like consistency.
- **Variety:** Aim to eat a variety of foods (when you have access to a variety of foods) and aim to have this variety in a “big picture” sense; for example, over the course of a month.
- **Drink liquids** throughout the day. Water is great. Other liquids are valid too. Identify what is effective to help you to stay hydrated.

#3: Mindfulness and food

- **Judgments and myths:** Practice mindfulness about food judgments and myths. These can interfere with experiencing the many functions of food – e.g., as a way to connect with friends and family, as pleasurable experiences, as functional self-validation, etc. **Food is inherently emotional.** We’re supposed to find food pleasurable – this has helped humans to survive.

Other stuff:

- Practice observing your cues for hunger, fullness, and satiety
 - For many people, becoming reacquainted with these cues takes lots and lots of practice
 - What are the different ways your body tells you it is hungry? (e.g., thinking about food increases, food sounds very appealing, irritability, fatigue, apathy, “foggy” brain, headache, shaky, dizzy), Full?
 - When you notice cues, do your best to respond to them
- Mindfully respond to your cravings
- Observe the effect of meal/ snack times. For example, many people find that having a snack before bed aids in having a more restful sleep.

- **Movement and rest:** Move your body in the way that feels good to you, and provide adequate rest. It's your body. You decide how much and if you want to move. Identify if judgments or emotions interfere in your decisions about movement. For many, regular, mindful movement is an effective aspect of long-term mood regulation. When participating in movement, do so in a way that feels good to you. Be mindful of your body cues. For example, refrain from exercising or alter your movement if something hurts. Be mindful of balancing movement with rest.
- **Food is a major social connector.** Not missing out because avoiding the food or because judgmental of the situation.

- Relationship between macronutrients and emotion regulation
 - Carbohydrates: the source of energy for your brain that your brain was designed to use
 - Proteins: are broken down into amino acids and then into neurotransmitters
 - Fats: Provide the insulation that allows brain cells to communicate quickly and efficiently. Required for absorption of some key vitamins.
- Problem solve Barriers (e.g., lack of access to food; emotions like guilt, shame or fear)