

How to Use the Hunger and Fullness Scale

| The Hunger and Fullness Scale | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|--------|-------|-----------|------|-----------|------------|---------|------|
| Ravenous | Starving | Hungry | Pangs | Satisfied | Full | Very Full | Discomfort | Stuffed | Sick |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

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The Hunger and Fullness Scale* is a useful tool for assessing your hunger and fullness levels before, during, and after you eat. It will help you identify your hunger cues, observe how different types and amounts of food affect you, and recognize when the urge to eat has been triggered by something other than hunger. This scale is not intended to set strict guidelines about when you should eat; rather, it helps you develop a greater awareness of your body's subtle signals.

The Hunger and Fullness Scale ranges from 1 to 10. A level 1 represents ravenous—you're so hungry you could eat this page. A level 10 means you're so full that you're in pain and feel sick. Remember, smaller numbers, smaller stomach; larger numbers, larger stomach.

In the middle of the scale is level 5: neutral, comfortable, or satisfied. At a 5, you cannot feel your stomach at all. It's neither empty nor full; it isn't growling or feeling stretched.

It helps to develop a good mental picture of what's happening to your stomach at these different levels of hunger and fullness. Make a fist with your right hand; your empty stomach is about that size.

This is a level 1. One or two handfuls of food will take you from a level 1 to a 5.

Another way to picture your stomach is to think of a balloon. When it's empty you're at a 1. When you blow that first puff of air into the balloon, it fills out gently and takes its shape. That's a 5.

As you take a deep breath and force more air into a balloon, its elastic walls begin to stretch and expand. These are levels 6 through 10. Your stomach is able to stretch to a 10 in order to hold excess food; therefore, the numbers over 5 indicate how stretched or uncomfortable your stomach feels.

If you blow too much air in, a balloon would continue to stretch and eventually pop. Fortunately, stomachs rarely rupture, but most of us have eaten so much at one time or another that we've said, "If I eat one more bite, I will explode!" When you feel this way, you're at a 10.

Of course, changes in blood sugar levels, energy levels, moods, and substances in the bloodstream resulting from the digestive process also signal hunger and fullness. These other clues help tell you how hungry or full you are.

It may be challenging at first to label your hunger and fullness levels with numbers, but as you practice, it becomes second nature. You can learn to use this awareness to decide when, what, and how much to eat.

Hunger and Fullness Descriptions*

1 - Ravenous: Too hungry to care what you eat. This is a high-risk time for overeating.

2 - Starving: You feel you must eat NOW!

3 - Hungry: Eating would be pleasurable, but you can wait longer.

4 - Hunger pangs: You're slightly hungry; you notice your first thoughts of food.

5 - Satisfied: You're content and comfortable. You're neither hungry nor full; you can't feel your stomach at all.

6 - Full: You can feel the food in your stomach.

7 - Very full: Your stomach feels stretched, and you feel sleepy and sluggish.

8 - Uncomfortable: Your stomach is too full, and you wish you hadn't eaten so much.

9 - Stuffed: Your clothes feel very tight, and you're very uncomfortable.

10 - Sick: You feel sick and/or you're in pain.

* From the book series: *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat*.

Michelle May, M.D. is a recovered yoyo dieter and the award-winning author of *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat: How to Break Your Eat-Repent-Repeat Cycle*. Download chapter one at <http://amihungry.com/chapter1>.