

Explore Your Relationship with Food

The purpose of this handout is to:

- Explore your thoughts and feelings about food.
- Suggest ways to find more support.

What is a positive relationship with food?

It can include:

- Being aware of how and why you eat
- Listening to your body signals for hunger and fullness
- Enjoying the taste, social, traditional, and cultural aspects of food
- Welcoming all foods without fear or guilt
- Looking at food as a source of energy, nourishment, and enjoyment
- Knowing that eating will change based on hunger, appetite, emotions, routines, or physical activity

A positive relationship with food is not the same for everyone.



A positive relationship with food can have benefits, such as:

- Improved mood, self-esteem, or body image
- Improved energy levels and feeling better physically after eating
- Less stress, fear, shame, and anxiety around food and eating.

What can affect your relationship with food?



Some examples are listed below. Think about which of these may apply to you.

Childhood events

- Family rules about food. For example, you had to finish all the food you were served.
- Seeing adults dieting, limiting, or avoiding certain foods.
- A strong focus on looks.

Media

- Comparing yourself to the looks and lifestyles of others shown in the media, such as television, magazines, or social media.
- Food and supplement marketing or claims.

Mental health

- A history of trauma or mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety.
- Difficulty managing emotions.

Negative thoughts about weight

- Negative attitudes towards people because of their body size or shape.

Access to Food

- Not always having food available as a child or adult.

Restricting Food

- Limiting types or amounts of food to lose weight or change your body.

Start exploring your relationship with food

Answer the following questions. **You can choose to focus on what is most important to you.** There is space to write your own notes.



You may feel some strong emotions after answering these questions. There are supports to help you connect with a mental health provider at the end of this handout.

Question	Notes
Do any experiences from your childhood make you feel bad about food and eating?	
	Is this something you might need more support with? Yes/ No/ Unsure
Have you ever changed the way you eat because of something you saw, read, or heard in the media?	
	Is this something you might need more support with? Yes/ No/ Unsure
How does the way you eat or think about food change when you feel stressed, anxious, depressed, or emotional?	
	Is this something you might need more support with? Yes/ No/ Unsure
Do you ever eat past the point of feeling comfortable because you are worried you will not get enough food for a while?	
	Is this something you might need more support with? Yes/ No/ Unsure
Is the way you eat affected by what other people say or do?	
	Is this something you might need more support with? Yes/ No/ Unsure

If you answered ‘Yes’ or ‘Unsure’ to one or more of the points above, you may benefit from some support from a health care provider. There is some information on how to do this on the next page.

More Support

Building or re-building a positive relationship with food can be hard and will be different for everyone. Having the support of a dietitian or mental health provider is important.

To get connected with a dietitian:



- Health Link has dietitians to answer nutrition questions. Call 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.



To get connected with a mental health provider:

- Ask your family doctor for a referral
- Call the Mental Health Helpline at 811 or 1-877-303-2646
- Visit Alberta Healthy Living Program at ahs.ca/ahlp

Resources

There are many self-help books and workbooks on building a positive relationship with food. These can be found on the internet, in bookstores or from your local library. Look for books written by experts in the field such as Registered Dietitians or mental health providers like Social Workers or Registered Psychologists.