Dear Alice,

Lots of people worry about overeating. I have the opposite problem. I just don't get hungry. Some days I'll realize it's 10 pm and I haven't eaten anything in 24 hours, but I don't feel any need to have food. (At this point I'll usually make myself eat something).

I maintain a healthy weight, but I'm sure this habit of forgetting to eat isn't good. Do you have any advice for boosting appetite?

Thanks,

?Really, I'm Not Hungry

Answer

Dear Really, I'm Not Hungry,

On the one hand, your body knows best. That is, taking cues and signals from your body about when to eat (and when to stop eating) is a surefire way to provide your body with what it needs—both in terms of quality and quantity. On the other hand, each body needs a minimum amount of fuel to run efficiently and at its highest potential. Based on your question, it sounds as though you may not be getting the minimum amount of fuel for your body. For most people, hunger is the number one reminder that they need to eat. To boost your hunger and appetite, you might want to consider trying the following tips:

- **Exercise daily.** At least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity each day has been shown to relieve stress, increase energy, and promote a healthy appetite.
- **Add variety to your regular diet.** Sometimes even the foods you enjoy can start to seem boring. Experimenting with new herbs and spices in addition to new foods might be a great way to get excited about eating.

Sometimes, however, poor appetite may be indicative of an underlying health issue. Research has shown that a loss of appetite can be associated with old age, as well as illness and even pregnancy. Illnesses as serious as cancer and as simple as the common cold are all known to decrease appetite. But it's not always physical: Mental health issues such as depression or anxiety can affect your appetite as well. A few questions to consider: Have you always had a low appetite? Is under-eating something new for you? If so, does this change in appetite or eating habits correlate with any other events or issues going on in your life? If this is a fairly new phenomenon or sudden change, you may want to speak to a health care provider.
provider to rule out any underlying issues. Columbia students can log on to Open Communicator [2] to make an appointment with either a medical provider or Registered Dietician [3] at Medical Services [4].

In the meantime, you can check out What to eat? [5] for an overview of well, what to eat. Generally, nutrition experts believe that the basis for a good diet is exercise, combined with eating lots colorful fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins such as poultry, fish, beans and eggs. It is advised that sugary drinks, red meats (beef, pork, lamb), processed meats (bacon, deli meats), and refined grains (white potatoes, white bread, white rice) as well as alcohol be consumed in moderation. Hope this advice whets your appetite!

Alice!
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