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## I'm bored, so I eat <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I am a 21-year-old male college student and I live in a fraternity house. I am finding that when I sit around the house, I get bored when I am not studying and often resort to going into the kitchen, and grabbing or making a snack. They are usually not the healthiest, but I always say that "it's only one." Then I feel really guilty after I eat it. I am starting to put the pounds back on now. I do work out, but don't have time to get into a set schedule. I try to keep myself busy, but I still eat a lot. Do you have any tips on how I can motivate myself or choose other activities that will push me away from the kitchen and the "College Diet?" Thanks.

— Fat Frat Guy

## **Answer**

Dear Fat Frat Guy,

You write that you're sitting around the fraternity house bored. Perhaps, if you think about your time creatively, you may have more time to get some physical activity in than you realize. Reframing how you think about addressing your boredom might set you on a new path, but tackling your snacking in tandem with ramping up your physical activity may help, too. The good news is there are a number of ways to address both issues you've mentioned — read on for a few strategies you can try out in order to relieve the doldrums!

First off, it sounds like in between classes, studying, and hanging out with friends, you've got some free time. This may be an opportunity to start fitting more physical activity. You mentioned it can be difficult to get into a set workout schedule. That said, getting active doesn't always need to be a long, intensive workout. Short, frequent bouts can also be beneficial for health — no matter when you squeeze them into your day. Why not grab your sneakers and go out for a walk or a jog? Does your fraternity house have a weight room? Taking advantage of exercise equipment is a great idea, but if there isn't any available, jumping rope between sets of push-ups and sit-ups, in your room, a living room, or den can help alleviate boredom. There are also loads of free workout videos on the internet you can watch to get inspiration.

To address your snacking concerns, take a moment to check in with yourself when the urge to

snack occurs. You might ask yourself: Am I actually hungry? Am I thirsty? When was the last time I ate? Could I put off eating for a few minutes? If you can wait a few minutes and then see how you feel, you may decide that you really weren't hungry after all, or you may even forget all about that snack. If you wait a few minutes and determine that you are hungry, it could be helpful to try to quantify your hunger. Figuring out *how* hungry you might be and what you're hungry for can help you make intentional choices about how much you want to eat, what kind of snack to reach for, and whether you want to snack at all. It's also possible to eat what you crave, take time to savor eating whatever it is you're craving, and move on feeling satisfied.

Before chowing down, it could be useful, to give some thought to the snack options available and what types of snacks may satisfy what you feel like eating. Are fruits and vegetables available? [Mayo Clinic](#) [2] recommends snacks such as air-popped popcorn, whole grain crackers, hummus, or nuts. You may be able to find balance, even within one snack. You may want to chat with the person responsible for food purchases to see if the snack options might be updated to include some healthier choices for the entire house. Having a variety of snacks can help ensure that you're getting the nutrients you need. All foods can fit into your diet, but some do have more nutritional value. Creating a balance can help ensure your body gets the nutrients it needs and that you still eat foods you enjoy.

While there is much pleasure to be gained from food, it can also be helpful to remember that in the body, it primarily serves as fuel and nourishment. If another part of you needs nourishment, you could try to figure out what that is and consider other ways of meeting that need. For example, maybe your mind needs enrichment — what about seeing if any of your fraternity brothers feel like playing a game? Or, you might realize that you're actually stressed or upset — are there other ways of coping with those feelings, such as talking to someone or doing a calming activity? Taking time to assess your body's signals and your true hunger level will help you feel confident over your decisions about when and what to eat. It can also help you fill your time with activities that nourish all parts of you, rather than unsatisfactorily snacking.

Bottom line: Taking time to figure out what your body really needs may help you pass the time in a more conscientious way. Paying close attention to your body's signals and ramping up the physical activity — somewhere further away from the kitchen — could be a good start!

Alice!

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