

Suggestions to Tame the Hungry Beast



Hunger is a strong and sometimes beneficial stimulus. However, at this time of the year when many are trying to maintain their new year's resolutions hunger can be a deal breaker.

Hunger drives us to search out food and feed the beast. Satiety is a pleasant feeling of fullness (just right, not overstuffed) and is your body's signal that the beast is calmed, at least for now. Satiety can be hard to achieve especially for those of us who suffer from food cravings. Hunger works against you when you are trying to lose weight and eat too little or put off eating for too long. The hungrier you are, the longer it takes for your body to feel satisfied. It can be a real challenge to avoid over eating and going straight to the overstuffed stage, especially if you are very hungry when you start eating.

Thus the first step is to eat at regular intervals. This doesn't mean that you must eat large amounts, but simply eat small amounts in intervals no more than 4 hours apart during your waking hours.

Recent research has exposed some helpful information that can be used to aid you in taming your hungry beast. One of the biggest factors is the type of food that you eat. Some foods fill your stomach and/or remain on your stomach longer than others. Generally foods which have greater weight are better at satisfying hunger. For example a baked potato can be more filling than the same volume of potato chips. Choosing to eat foods which are satisfying and stay in you stomach longer will help you avoid bingeing on the high calorie foods.

Because of the strong relation between satiety and a food's weight some researchers have recommended consuming all foods with low caloric densities- i.e. foods that have the fewest calories per ounce. This is the basis of the book Volumetrics by nutritionist Barbara Rolls, PhD. Diets based on this idea include the cabbage soup diet and grapefruit diet. Unfortunately weight alone is not the sole predictor of satiety. Largely these diets overlook the enjoyment factor of foods.

Many savory foods, including onions, garlic, mushrooms, citrus zest, herbs and spices add an enjoyment factor and prevent lower calorie meals from becoming too bland and unappetizing. Hence it is a good strategy to add those stronger flavored foods in your meal plan.

Hot foods and especially hot beverages can help to sooth the savage beast. You might try finishing your meal with a cup of hot tea or coffee instead of or certainly before deciding to indulge in sweets. If you do decide on a sweet you might want to try the European custom of having a small piece of dark chocolate with your coffee instead of something more decadent.



The fullness factor of foods can be important. That value is highest for green vegetables, then whole fruits and then lean proteins such as chicken breast, broiled steak and fish. The fullness factor is lowest for fats, sugars and salty foods. Water, juice and soft drinks are initially filling but clear the stomach quickly. These fluids can be consumed within thirty minutes prior to a meal to speed up your normal fullness level. Alcohol consumption conversely often peaks the appetite and dulls the fullness response. Use with caution when trying to restrict calorie intake!



High fiber foods have a high satiety value. It is always better to choose whole grain cereals and breads. Do be aware however that too much added fat or sugar in these products will reduce the satiety level. In other words, a sugary granola is not as good a choice as plain oatmeal if you are trying to minimize your food and calorie intake.

It is important to note that fullness and satiety can also be very individual and related to other health concerns such as endocrine disorders. Extreme difficulty in controlling your appetite would be a very good reason to consult your doctor.

Legumes are an excellent source of fiber and antioxidants so here is a recipe which is warm, savory and full of nutrients.

Black Bean Soup (4 servings)

- 1 Tbsp. canola oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 Tbsp Chili powder
- 1 tsp. cumin
- 2- 15 ounce cans of black beans, rinsed
- 3 cups water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ prepared salsa
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt
- 1 Tbsp. lime juice
- 4 Tbsp. reduced fat sour cream (optional)
- 2 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro (optional)

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté stirring until the onion softens, 2-3 minutes, add the chili powder and cumin and continue cooking for 1 more minute. Add the beans, water, salsa and salt. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and cook at a simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the lime juice. Transfer half of the soup to a blender and puree (use caution with the hot soup). Return the soup to the saucepan and mix. Serve the hot soup garnished with the sour cream and cilantro.

