

Non-hungry eating® – a key missing piece of the healthy weight management puzzle



By Dr Rick Kausman, author of *If Not Dieting, Then What*

As we are all well aware a significant percentage of people are above the healthiest weight that they could be. The big challenge is what we can do to help. It would be terrific if simply letting people know the situation would be enough to create change – but unfortunately, it isn't. Our clients/patients can become above their most comfortable weight through a complex mix of behaviour, biology, psychology, culture and environment.

And helping people to start to make change is very much like helping them to put a complicated jigsaw puzzle together. Two of the pieces of the puzzle are our patients' knowledge of what is healthy to eat and an understanding that it is important to be physically active. And while these two pieces are relevant, they are far from the only two pieces of the healthy weight management puzzle for most of us. Other pieces almost always include helping our patients to: eat more slowly, feel better about their body image, not be seduced by quick fix diets, not feel guilty about eating various types of foods (feeling guilty most often leads to all-or-nothing thinking that ends up in eating more rather than eating less), and, very importantly, help with decreasing a key eating behaviour I call non-hungry eating.

Non-hungry eating®

We can all eat food when we are not really feeling physically hungry. This sort of eating can be called **non-hungry eating®**. Non-hungry eating can include things like overeating, grazing, picking, nibbling and bingeing. Non-hungry eating can occur at any time, such as at the times we eat our main meals, in between the times we eat our main meals and even overnight. Many of us can do a significant amount of this sort of eating - certainly enough to be a big factor in causing weight gain and difficulty in maintaining a comfortable weight. It's quite normal to do some non-hungry eating (and can even be helpful in the short-term in some situations), but when we do too much it gets our eating pattern out of balance.

Why is it so common and so easy to end up doing too much non-hungry eating? Firstly, it may be because we are not sure if we are **really** physically hungry or not. Sometimes it can be very difficult to tell the difference between a physical hunger and a feeling we get that makes us want to put food in our mouth. When people are asked to estimate the percentage of non-hungry eating they have been doing, the answers range from 30 to 40%, to more frequently, anything up to 60 to 100% of their total eating. In other words, it is very easy for many of us to eat a great deal of the time when we are not really physically hungry.

Secondly, we might not be aware of the many different reasons that can contribute to our non-hungry eating.

The following is a list of some of the common reasons that can contribute to a large amount of non-hungry eating. Our clients/patients might be:

- 1) in the early stages of recognising the difference between hungry and non-hungry eating;
- 2) not giving themselves enough time to listen to what their body signals might be telling them;
- 3) not sure when to stop eating (e.g. parents told us to finish everything on our plate);
- 4) getting too hungry/eating too quickly;
- 5) eating because the clock says it is breakfast/lunch/dinner time: 'meal time' eating;
- 6) eating due to almost any emotion or feeling.

Decreasing non-hungry eating

A great tool to help our patients to decrease some of their non-hungry eating is by encouraging them to check in on a hunger/fullness scale before they have something to eat. By simply being more mindful, many people can quite quickly start to decrease the amount of non-hungry eating they are doing.

ifnotdieting hunger/fullness scale

- 10 Stuffed full**
- 8 Overfull**
- 5 Comfortably full**
- 2 Getting Empty**
- 0 Absolutely Empty**

For more comprehensive support with regard to eating more mindfully, an eating awareness diary (as distinct from a food diary that simply asks patients to list the type of food they are eating) is also a great tool to help people observe what is happening in more detail around food. It is a resource that through both experience and research has been found to be effective.

For more information regarding non-hungry eating, the person-centred approach to healthy weight management, and the 2-day ifnotdieting healthy weight management training program, please go to www.ifnotdieting.com