

“Intuitive Eating for the Whole Family: Reclaim the Inner Intuitive Eater to Raise Confident Eaters”

Webinar Questions Answered by Chelsey Amer, MS, RDN, CDN

- How do you offset criticism from peers at school or other environments related to cultural foods that are brought for lunch and snacks? Do you examine the strength of peer influence in middle grades and high school, particularly its impact on children compared to the influence of their family diet and environment?

I would approach this the same way I would with any difference that's brought up in school, from someone wearing glasses to someone in a wheelchair. Everyone gets what they need, and that is the food that your culture eats. If your child is uncomfortable about this, it's probably age-appropriate, as teens want to fit in with their peers. We cannot control those external disruptors to a child's intuitive eating, which is why it's important to encourage intuitive eating at home as much as possible.

- How do you (would you) address when food/ sugar seems to be a substitute substance in substance use disorder recovery? Or with mental health, psychotropic medications cause intense hunger?

I would work with a therapist on this and refer to a therapist.

- What do you say to toddlers who constantly ask for candy?

If you see a toddler become obsessed with sweets, it's important to offer them regularly, alongside meals or snacks. You can then say “that's not on the menu right now” when you're not offering candy.

- What insights might you have about intuitive eating when someone is on a medication that increases or decreases their appetite (prednisone, Adderall, etc.)?

This can be an obstacle, but part of intuitive eating is eating for self-care. You need to respect all types of hunger, not just physical hunger. Practical hunger is eating because you know your body needs nourishment. In the case of a reduced appetite, setting alarms to eat something throughout the day can be helpful. For an increased appetite, still try to listen to your hunger and fullness cues the best you can and approach your nutrition with compassion.

- What are the data on Intuitive Eating regarding successful long-term weight loss, and how does that compare with EBT results?

Intuitive eating should not be used for intentional weight loss.

- Are there any good kid nutrition books you'd recommend?

I don't have any nutrition books specifically for kids, but there are a couple of books on differences or body image that I like...

[I Like Me](#)

[What I like about me](#)

[Everybody has a body](#)

- How do you work with a patient who, every time they eat, gets angry? Like a life of dieting already.

I would have to dig into this more, but I would explore where those feelings of anger around food come from and why they're getting angry.

- Going back to your story of the mini muffins at the birthday party...is the recommendation to keep some of these more indulgent foods in the house so kids have exposure to them, or is it better to model having a refrigerator and pantry full of more nutritious foods?

Research shows that kids can hyper fixate on foods that are restricted. This can include sneaking foods, eating more of these foods when they are available, and becoming obsessed with these foods (like my son did with the mini muffins). In this case, I would recommend that you keep a variety of foods in the house, including the more indulgent foods, and serve them alongside other nutrient-dense foods too. You can model having all foods in the house.

- How do we obtain Chelsea's worksheets?

Email me - chelsey@chelseyamernutrition.com

- Any resources/ apps for intuitive eating you'd recommend for kids/ parents?

Growing Intuitive Eaters has a great free course that could be helpful - <https://growingintuitiveeaters.com/growing-intuitive-eaters-101/>

- Say a mother is pescatarian, how would you form the answer to your child asking why mommy does not eat meat like daddy does?

Something as simple as "Mommy doesn't like meat right now, the same way [insert food] isn't your favorite. We all have different taste preferences, and that's OK."

- What do you tell parents who allow their children to access social media when you suspect they have a challenging relationship with food?

I encourage them to really monitor their social media and limit access, as able. Even more, auditing who they're following can be helpful too. Having open discussions about why can also be helpful.

- How do you implement a snack schedule while teaching young children to follow their hunger cues? My 2- and 4-year-olds seem to want snacks a little more often than I had planned.

I would offer toddlers food every 2-4 hours, depending on your child and their appetite. First I would wonder if they're eating enough at snack time, and are you offering a balanced option that will keep them full more than 30 minutes (typically this includes adding some protein/fat to a carb-based snack). If they're eating enough, but still searching for snacks, are you offering different foods at snack time vs. meal time? Sometimes kids realize that they get certain foods for "snacks" and others for meals. Making it more even across the board can help.

- But broccoli and ice cream aren't the same health-wise! How do you reconcile that?

This is true and valid, but you don't hold a different moral value for eating one or the other. All foods can fit in an overall balanced diet, so why add guilt and shame while offering one of these foods? As ice cream becomes more "neutral" in your eyes, and less "I have to eat it now or never," you may even be able to eat less over time.

- I appreciate that you also have a picky eater. I also have one and try to get him involved in meal prep, which he enjoys. How do you handle getting them to "try" new foods, such as vegetables?

I am not a pediatric nutrition expert, but from what I've read and learned at conferences, keep trying and exposing. Put it on their plate at dinner. If they get upset, you can introduce a "no thank you bowl" where they can discard foods they don't want. My daughter just started eating smoothies, for example, and she adds the spinach herself and the cocoa powder (she loves chocolate). So just keep going!

- Is there any guidance for kids who can't recognize when they are hungry and become hypoglycemic, and mentally can't identify that they need food?

It can be helpful to check in with kids regularly if you think they're having trouble identifying their hunger cues. Some extra reminders can be helpful, as well as serving meals/snacks regularly.

- How would you recommend getting folks of lower SES the benefits of IE? I'd hate to think that they wouldn't have access to all the benefits of IE. Is there a way to make IE more accessible to all (rather than just those who have more financial means)?

This is a great question! I think some of the principles can be applied to all SES (ditching diets, making peace with food, challenging the food police, eliminating emotional eating, movement for joy, aiming for satisfying meals, as able), but others may be more difficult to practice (like honoring hunger/fullness).

- How do you help kids navigate candy when it makes them super hyper, especially one of my kids, and it doesn't affect the others as much?

This may be age-dependent, so if your child is old enough, having a conversation about how candy feels in their body could be appropriate. It's OK to say that certain foods don't react well in your body and why. But explaining it from the perspective of function versus "bad" can be helpful. I would also try to serve candy with a protein/fat-filled food for both of your kids to see if this helps.

- Have you seen Intuitive Eating applied in cases with child obesity that's impacting their health, i.e., diabetes, high cholesterol, etc?

Yes, you can apply the principles of IE while applying MNT for diabetes and high cholesterol. Although IE is not a weight-centered approach, it is a health-focused approach. I would consider what you can *add* versus take away from a child's diet.

- My son, who is now 22, still will not eat fruits and veggies. He has freaked out with and near-by his food! What can I do now that he is an adult? My older son, who is 23, is the opposite and eats fruit and veggies.

I would have to know more about your son before describing how to help exactly, but could you talk to him about why he has a fear of them? Is there any way he would eat them? Fruit baked into a baked good, for example, or spinach blended into a smoothie?

- How do I normalize packaged foods? I hate spending the money on processed snacks, but maybe I'm creating a problem.

It's OK if spending money on packaged foods isn't in your values and you'd rather spend money elsewhere. I think that's a discussion to have with your kids so they also understand where you're coming from. Even if my kids asked for soda, I wouldn't buy it because it's not in my value system to keep soda in the house. As my kids get older - if they ask - I will explain this and the reasons I don't keep soda in the house that have to do with health over weight-related reasons.

- Do you limit the number of servings of highly processed food?

As the adult, I decide when to serve highly processed foods, as according to Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility it is the adult's decision what to serve and when. When I decide to serve them, however, I typically let my kids eat as much as they want (kids decide how much to eat), making sure there's enough for everyone.

- Can intuitive eating work for people struggling with food insecurity?

I think some of the principles can be applied to all SES (ditching diets, making peace with food, challenging the food police, eliminating emotional eating, movement for joy, aiming for satisfying meals, as able), but others may be more difficult to practice (like honoring hunger/fullness).

- How do you deal with other family members who encourage toxic diet culture?

Our kids will face many external disruptors to their natural intuitive eating, including toxic diet culture from other family members. Depending on the family member, you can educate them, or you can have a discussion with your kids that other families do things differently. The same way screen time rules vary from family to family, so can the way you handle food.

If your kids ask about toxic diet culture statements, you can explain why you don't follow that philosophy or why something is incorrect.

- What's the best language to use if a middle school child is overweight and continues to overeat?

A child can be healthy even if they're considered "overweight," so first, getting bloodwork is necessary to see the state of their health. If you think a child is overeating often, working as a family on identifying hunger and fullness cues can be helpful. Make a point to have check-ins during meals and snacks. Limiting food will not be helpful and can actually backfire, as discussed in the webinar.

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