

Eating Competence

Why isn't eating enjoyable?

Eating is supposed to be enjoyable. For too many of us, eating represents trouble. We feel guilty if we eat what we "shouldn't." We feel deprived if we eat what we "should." We eat more than we think we should. We worry about weight. Surveys show

that nutrition suffers when the joy goes out of eating. Only one in five people get their five-a-day of fruits and vegetables, and many people are overweight. What we are doing isn't working. But what do we do instead?

What is a competent eater?

The Satter Eating Competence Model encourages you to trust yourself. You may eat as much as you are hungry for, eat the foods that you like, and have enjoyable meals with other people. Competent Eating has four parts:

- Feeling positive about eating
- Being reliable about feeding yourself
- Eating food you enjoy
- Eating enough to feel satisfied

Make friends with food.

You may worry that being so positive and relaxed will send your eating out of control and make you gain weight. Not so. Being able to eat as much as you want of the foods you like makes your eating orderly and trustworthy. Foods you no longer *have* to eat

become enjoyable foods that you eat for pleasure. Foods that are no longer *forbidden* become ordinary foods that you enjoy without worrying about eating too much. Large portions don't make you overeat because you can eat as much—or as little—as you want.

Why be a competent eater?

People who are eating competent are healthy. They have better nutrition, weigh less, and are more satisfied with what they weigh. They are also healthier emotionally and socially. People with high eating competence feel more capable and are more self-aware. They are more trusting and comfortable both with themselves and with other people.

To become competent with your eating, stop worrying about food and stop trying to go without. Instead,

- Have rewarding, regular, and reliable meals
- Pay attention while you eat
- Eat what and how much you want

For more about eating competently (and for research backing up this advice), see Ellyn Satter's *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family: How to Eat, How to Raise Good Eaters, How to Cook*, Kelcy Press, 2008. Also see www.EllynSatterInstitute.org to review other resources.

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