

# ***The Psychology of Eating***

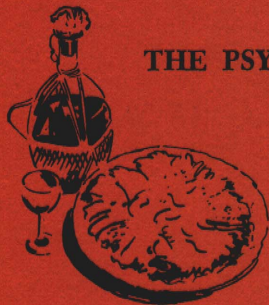
---

**Why we do what we do**

*A Guide for Programmed Learning and Discussion*

FILE COPY  
DO NOT REMOVE

**EXTENSION BULLETIN E-631 — HOME AND FAMILY SERIES — OCTOBER 1968  
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE — MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY**



## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EATING

BY ANITA DEAN, *Extension Specialist in Foods and Nutrition*  
and

MARGARET JACOBSON, *Extension Specialist in Family Life*

*Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Agriculture. George S. McIntyre, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, Mich.*

1P—11:68—10M—MB

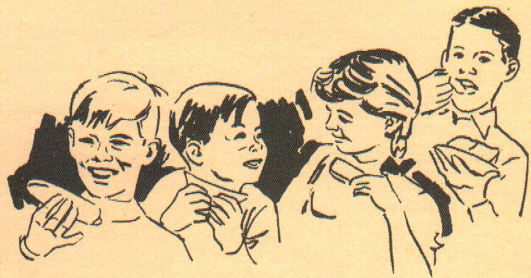
## INSTRUCTIONS

This is a guide for individual study or group discussion.

Each page contains a question or statement, or an answer to the previous question, with additional information.

Answer the first question, by checking the answer you think is best.

Then check your answer against the answer on the next page. Discuss the answers. Go on to the next question or statement. Proceed in the same way throughout the book.



Research proves that human behavior is determined mainly by biological inheritance rather than by what people learn.

Agree\_\_\_\_\_

Disagree\_\_\_\_\_

Don't Know\_\_\_\_\_

Answer: **DISAGREE**

Research **has not proved** all of the things that determine behavior, and how much each thing contributes.

We know that we do what we do partly because of our biological inheritance — our physical characteristics and our inherited tendencies — and **also** because of what has happened to us — what we learn and experience.

All people have the same needs in the same degree as everyone else.

Agree\_\_\_\_\_

Disagree\_\_\_\_\_

Don't Know\_\_\_\_\_

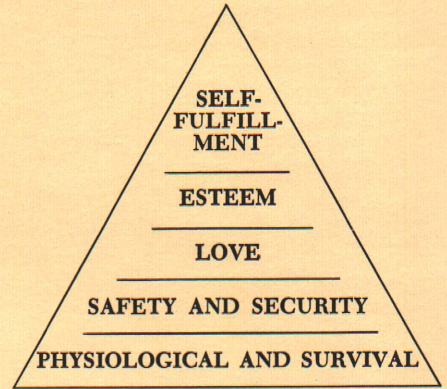
Answer: **DISAGREE**

As human beings, we all probably have these same basic needs:

- for food, shelter, air and other biological necessities
- for safety and security
- for love, contact with others, for communication
- for esteem
- for reaching one's fullest potential.

However, the **degree, strength and intensity** of these needs vary with individuals. These needs form a pyramid or "hierarchy," beginning with the most basic physical needs to survive and going up to higher needs. Usually we do not move from a lower to a higher level unless we have some minimum satisfaction on a lower level. For example, we must have enough food to exist before we feel the need for saving money, or for self-esteem. "Man does not live by bread alone — unless there is no bread."

Needs act as motivators to action. We do things to satisfy the needs. Sometimes we become "stuck" at a lower level and do not do what we are capable of achieving.





It is selfish for a person to feel the need for recognition.

Agree\_\_\_\_\_

Disagree\_\_\_\_\_

Don't Know\_\_\_\_\_

Answer: **DISAGREE**

We all seem to need some recognition. We need to feel good about ourselves. We need to feel that "I am somebody."

Some people seem to have a greater need for recognition than others. This may be because of some lack in their lives.

We are always consciously aware of why we act the way we do.

Agree\_\_\_\_\_

Disagree\_\_\_\_\_

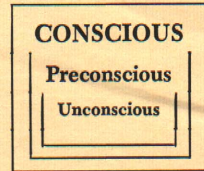
Don't Know\_\_\_\_\_

Answer: **DISAGREE**

We do some of the things we do because of conscious desires. For example: We want to earn money so we learn a skill to help us get a job.

**But**, some of our behavior is the result of unconscious processes. Inner drives push us to do some things. For example, we may not be aware of the need for recognition or for love.

Some things are nearer the conscious level. They are in the “pre-conscious”; other things are buried more deeply — close to the unconscious.



The desire for food is not always due to the need to satisfy a physiological drive.

Agree\_\_\_\_\_

Disagree\_\_\_\_\_

Don't Know\_\_\_\_\_

Answer: **AGREE**

Our body does need a certain amount of food — protein, carbohydrates, fats, minerals, and vitamins — in order to grow and function properly. However, we also desire food sometimes to meet other needs.

Food is associated with some of our earliest and most satisfying memories and experiences. For example, as children, when we were hungry we were fed by our mothers. Both the food and being held were pleasurable. They relieved anxiety and made us feel secure.

We associate food with the love and comfort of being held.

This is one reason why we enjoy eating. It not only tastes good; it makes us feel good.

Go to the Next Page

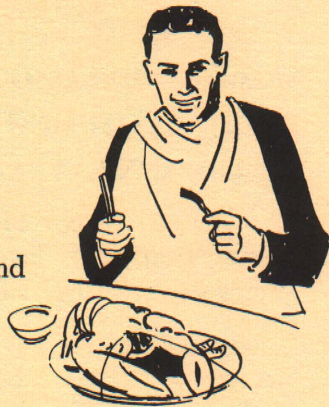
Fill in the blanks:

Among the reasons we enjoy eating is because we

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ it with pleasurable and

(2) \_\_\_\_\_ experiences.

Food can relieve (3) \_\_\_\_\_.



Answers: (1) **ASSOCIATE** (could also be **CONNECT**)

(2) **SATISFYING** (could also be **ENJOYABLE, EARLY, LOVING, etc.**)

(3) **ANXIETY** (could also be **TENSION, HUNGER**)

Changes in our life such as getting a job, having a baby, children leaving home, death of a loved one, being alone, can create new anxieties. In these times we may find ourselves eating more than usual in order to feel secure.

Sometimes food is used as a “treat” or as a reward. For instance, getting ice cream or candy because we were good.

This is another reason why sometimes we indulge in certain foods.

Go to the Next Page



**Fill in the blank:**

One reason why we may treat ourselves to a hot fudge sundae is to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ ourselves.



Answer: **REWARD**

Maybe after we have worked especially hard we feel we “deserve” something especially good to eat.

Sometimes, we may not get the recognition we need or deserve, so we reward ourselves by eating.

Even though we may not have felt hungry before, the smell or sight of freshly baked bread can make us want to eat.



Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: **AGREE**

Food can act as a stimulus to the hypothalamus, a tiny area near the base of the brain.

This, in turn, helps to stimulate the stomach to contract, giving rise to feelings of hunger.

The hypothalamus may also be stimulated by other things.

Other mechanisms may also be important in explaining hunger.

**Fill in the blanks:**

Give 5 reasons why people eat what they eat.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Answer:

There are many reasons why people eat what they do. Here are some.

Eating is a pleasurable experience.

We like the taste.

"Everybody's doing it."

Tradition.

It's expected of one.

Food easily available.

Doctor's orders.

Simply to stay alive.

To attain "desired" weight.

For good health.

Maintain present weight without gaining.

Satisfy hunger.

Show success, wealth, prestige.

Frustrated.

Depressed.

Reward self.

Please someone.

Feel lonely, isolated, rejected.

Bored — nothing else to do.

Matter of habit.

Relieve nervous tension.

Can't think of anything but food.

Tempted by pictures and recipes in advertising.

Give one feelings of strength and power.

**WHICH OF THE ABOVE APPLY TO YOU?**

Which of the following factors do you think would be most important in predicting success in dieting for weight control over a period of years? Check the blanks.

- |    | YES                      | NO                       |  |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| a. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Successful in losing weight when first starting to diet. |
| b. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Low level of anxiety when starting to diet.              |
| c. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Marital status   |

- |    | YES                      | NO                       |   |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| d. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Family income.                            |
| e. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Ability to count calories.                |
| f. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Knowing the effect of weight on health.   |
| g. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Whether or not you were obese as a child. |

Answer:

Very little is known about what enables some people to reduce and stay at a lower weight level. The results of treatment for obesity are rather poor. Many people regain the pounds lost. However, results of research about the items on the previous page indicate that all of them except "e" and "f" are good predictors of success in dieting.

a. **YES** One study showed that success during the first week or month of dieting was very predictive of how a patient would do over the entire diet. This study found that the degree of weight loss between the first and second visits to the doctor was most predictive of success.

**Continued on Next Page**



**b. YES** The same study showed that long-term successful dieters had the lowest levels of depressions, while the long-term unsuccessful dieters had the highest. People with high anxiety rarely lost much weight. Dieters with very low levels of anxiety were more successful.

**c. YES** Marital status seems important. Single women under 30 did very well, but those over 30 did very poorly. Widowed, separated, and divorced also did quite poorly.

**d. YES** Well-to-do-dieters seem to be more successful than dieters with low income.

**Continued on Next Page**

e. **NO** The ability to select a well-balanced, low-calorie diet and to count calories does not appear to influence an individual to stay on a diet. Knowledge of nutrition usually doesn't cancel out the influence of personal preference.

f. **DON'T KNOW** Knowing that excess overweight can become a menace to health and decrease our life expectancy has not influenced many to change their eating habits to lose weight.

g. **YES** People who were obese in childhood have been found to be less successful in dieting than those who developed obesity in adult life.

How would you rate the following as motivations for yourself to lose or gain weight? Rate them 1, 2, 3, etc., in order of importance for yourself (1 = most important).

- a. \_\_\_\_ Better health
- b. \_\_\_\_ Like yourself better
- c. \_\_\_\_ Better appearance
- d. \_\_\_\_ Getting and holding a job.
- e. \_\_\_\_ Getting back into your clothes.
- f. \_\_\_\_ Be more popular.
- g. \_\_\_\_ Greater efficiency; easier to get around.
- h. \_\_\_\_ Keeping affection and respect of family.
- i. **Other:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Answer:

**All of these can be motivations** to lose or gain weight or to maintain weight.

You have to decide and find out which one(s) are important and will work for you.

In order to reach a goal, such as losing weight, you must have a strong motivation to reach it. You must keep up your motivation through continuous and regular reminders.

Which of the following do you think would be most likely to help you lose weight?  
Check the blanks of those you choose.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Getting interested in knitting, sewing, or some other creative activity.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Taking up ice skating, skiing, swimming, or another sport.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Taking care of a dog.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Keeping track of what you eat and counting calories.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Keeping a weekly weight record.
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ Falling in love.
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Inheriting \$1,000.
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ Going to a reducing salon.
- i. \_\_\_\_\_ Joining a weight-reducing group.
- j. \_\_\_\_\_ Joining another type of group or class which will give satisfaction.
- k. \_\_\_\_\_ Making a conscious effort to eat more slowly.
- l. \_\_\_\_\_ Checking with a physician at regular intervals.

**Answer:**

**a, b, c, f, g, i, j,** may provide pleasurable, satisfying activities to replace eating.

**d, e, h, i, k, l,** can serve as constant reminders to reinforce your desire to stay on your diet.

**h, i,** may provide sympathetic group support to help you reach your goal and may also serve as constant reminders. Weight reducing clubs offer much companionship and realistic support from persons who have intimate appreciation of the powerful inner drives to overeat.

**l,** a reputable physician provides an individual evaluation based on your body constitution and lifelong habits of eating to determine (1) desirability of weight loss, (2) amount of weight loss, (3) rate of weight loss, (4) degree of caloric restriction.

In addition he will provide added attention during periods of distress and will provide encouragement and support and will make the mechanics of eating fewer calories as comfortable as possible.

List three things you can do to make your life more satisfying, more interesting and give you new goals to work toward?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

- A. Picture a food you especially enjoy.
- B. Visualize the thing you fear the most in connection with your weight.
- C. Now bring these two images together into the same picture.

Do you think that this technique of pairing your thoughts about food with your concerns and motives about weight could help you stick on your diet?

Try it and see.



What would be a logical way to start if you want to lose weight? In the blanks, number in the order in which you think most logical (No. 1 = most logical).

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Know **what** you are presently eating — how many calories you're getting.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Know **when** you are taking in most of your calories.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Know **why** you eat what you do — what satisfactions you're getting from eating.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Know your activity pattern — **how much** exercise you're getting.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Know **why** you want to lose weight — **what** your motivations are.
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ Know your **food preferences** — what foods you like or dislike.
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Find out if you should go on a diet. Get advice and support from your physician.
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ Plan a diet within your budget.

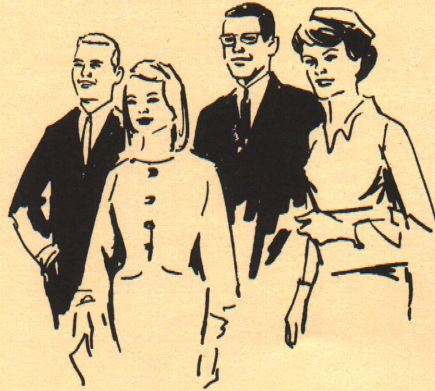
Answer:

All of the factors listed are important for successful, long term dieting. Determination and motivation (e) are crucial. In order to be well motivated, we need to understand the reason for the changes. Sympathetic support and understanding and the medical advice of a physician (g) are important, especially if you are considerably overweight.

Analyzing your present eating pattern (a and b) and trying to determine the reasons for your overeating (c) will make it possible to plan a more satisfying reducing diet. Your long term reducing diet should make allowances for your food likes and dislikes (f). It need not be monotonous and unappetizing. It must be a diet which you can afford to purchase (h) and must furnish fewer calories than you are burning up in your daily activities (d). Customary food habits and the daily routine of living cannot be neglected.

In sum, we suggest you start with (e) — Know your own motivations; then do the other things.

Most people achieve what they are capable of achieving.



Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_

Answer:

**DON'T KNOW** — Some people, however, would say **DISAGREE**.

It is believed that many of us have more potential than we tap, that we can do more things than we try, or give ourselves credit for. We have a need to fulfill ourselves — this can be in many ways — by creating, by working, by study, by loving.

This is our highest level of need, but many of us center our lives around lower level needs, important as they are, of food, shelter, security. The challenge is to find ways to reach our higher needs.

This will call for finding new interests, projects, hobbies, and satisfying daily activities.

## SUMMARY

With this new learning tool we have tried to help you understand:

- Some of the reasons why we act the way we do.
- How our basic needs for food, shelter, security, love, recognition, achievement, and self-fulfillment motivate us.
- Some of the reasons why we eat the way we do.
- Some of the reasons why it is difficult to change eating habits.



Check your answers to the questions below, tear out, and give to your discussion leader.

1. Was this learning tool interesting and fun to use?

Very\_\_\_\_\_      Some\_\_\_\_\_      Little or None\_\_\_\_\_

2. Has this discussion helped you understand some of the reasons why you eat as you do?

Yes\_\_\_\_\_      No\_\_\_\_\_      Already Knew\_\_\_\_\_

3. Has this discussion increased your understanding of why weight control is such a complex and difficult matter?

Yes\_\_\_\_\_      No\_\_\_\_\_      Not sure\_\_\_\_\_





## FOR FURTHER READING

### GENERAL PUBLICATIONS

“Human Behavior” by Bernard Berelsen and Gary A. Steiner, (paperback) 1967.  
Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc.

“Food and Man,” Miriam E. Lowenberg, 1968, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., N.Y.

“The Importance of Being Overweight,” 1967, Hilda Bruch, W. W. Norton & Co.

“Food — The Yearbook of Agriculture — 1959” U. S. Dept. of Agriculture.

## MSU PUBLICATIONS

(At County Extension Offices or MSU Bulletin Office,  
P. O. Box 231, East Lansing, Michigan 48823.)

“Changing Food Habits,” E-613

“Nutrition For You,” CE-26

“Meals With Meaning,” CE-27

## SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS

“Food Habits Research: Problems of the 1960’s,” by Margaret Mead, National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council (NAS-NRC) Publication 1225.

“Manual for the Study of Food Habits,” NAS-NRC Bulletin 111.

“The Problem of Changing Food Habits,” NAS-NRC Bulletin 108.

(These three publications contain some of the findings of basic research conducted during World War II by the National Committee on Food Habits. Check your public library for availability.)

