

Listen to your hunger

Author suggests people tap into their instinctive ability to eat

Reformed yo-yo dieter Dr. Michelle May spent 20 years of her life on what she now calls the vicious "eat-repent-repeat cycle" before she came to a stark realization about diets.

"Diets don't work. If they did, we'd only need one," says the 47-year-old retired family physician who has become a full-time motivational weight-management speaker.

"But it's so common. So many people are trying one thing after the next thinking they just haven't found the right diet or they just don't have enough willpower or maybe their metabolism is shot. I finally realized that maybe all of that wasn't the underlying problem."

May, based in Phoenix, Ariz., admits she began dieting before she was a teenager and continued the roller-coaster ride for "a good couple of decades" right into her medical practice, where many of her patients were struggling with their weight, too.

She eventually managed to break the senseless cycle of depriving herself, giving in to cravings, feeling guilty and returning to prior habits.

"For me, it was about deciding that all foods could fit into a healthy diet, that there are no bad or good foods," she explains. "And instead of using external rules like how much to eat and what I was allowed to eat, I've now learned how to tap into my own instinctive ability to eat."

May reverted to the natural way she ate as a baby — eating when she's hungry, stopping when she's full and not thinking about food again until she's hungry again.

"(As a baby) I ate what I loved and didn't overeat the things I liked because food didn't have any power over me," she adds.

As people grow older, May points out, many find themselves eating due to environmental triggers — time of day, presence of food, free food, food that they paid for or large



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portions — and emotional triggers — boredom, loneliness, stress, sadness, anger, love or celebration.

If that sounds like you, then May suggests the next time you feel like eating, stop and ask yourself whether you're actually hungry. You may be using food to meet a need, such as boredom, for example.

"As soon as you stop eating you're going to be bored again," May points out. "Then you're going to want to eat again. Is that really working for you?"

If you really are hungry, May says, then choose food you love and eat it in a way that shows you love it.

"That means slow down, turn off the TV and pay attention to your body and how full you're getting," she adds.

The married mother of two teens is the award-winning author of *Am I Hungry? What to Do When Diets Don't Work*. Her newest book is *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat: How to Break the Eat-Repent-Repeat Cycle*.

Besides her sensible approach to eating, May has learned that exercise must be enjoyable and never viewed as "punishment." With that mindset, she tries to exercise at least four times a week, doing a mix of 45-minute hikes and yoga classes — two activities she loves.

"I actually became a yoga instructor in my 40s," she says. "It's flexibility, strength, stamina and mindfulness all rolled up into one. It's perfect for me."

May, who doesn't like to talk about her weight, says she's about six sizes down

from when she was at her heaviest.

"I am not at my lowest weight now and I don't think I ever will be because I don't think that lowest weight was necessarily realistic for my body and my lifestyle," she says.

"But even though I'm not as low as I've been, I'm much more fit than I've ever been in my life."

Visit www.AmIHungry.com for more info.

Cary Castagna is a certified personal trainer through Can-Fit-Pro. Visit the Keeping Fit blog at <http://blogs.cnn.ca/keepingfit>

MICHELLE'S FITNESS TIPS

- 1) A healthy lifestyle isn't about being perfect.
- 2) Food is fuel. It's not so much about being good as it is about feeling good.
- 3) Don't exercise to burn calories or to pay penance for the food you ate. Exercise can't be punishment. It's got to be enjoyable.



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Dr. Michelle May says that you should eat like a baby: eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full.