

Dear Readers,

I can't believe that it's been over three years since that day I anxiously sat in the waiting room for my first appointment with an eating disorder dietitian. Although the appointment was quite uncomfortable for various reasons, I came away with the concept of intuitive eating. It was something that I had never heard of before, but, after listening to my dietitian explain it to me, I felt a sense of hope, like there could be a way to escape my dieting hell.

Because I know that so many people out there hesitate when first starting intuitive eating, I would like to share with you a few of my articles about my first steps into this new way of looking at food and our bodies. I hope my words bring some comfort to newcomers as well as those in the early stages of this process because, although there may be tears, stress, and moments when you want to just say "Screw this!" and run towards another diet, it is possible to become an intuitive eater.

#### *What Is This Intuitive Eating You Speak Of?*

This article is simply what intuitive eating means to me.

#### *Almost in Denial*

Reading Almost Anorexic helped me realize that I had a problem and pushed me to seek help for the first time.

#### *Take This Diet and Shove It*

I hit rock bottom and found myself angry at being suckered into the dieting world.

#### *How Long Does Intuitive Eating Take?*

I take a stab at answering this question since I know this is on the minds of many intuitive eating newcomers.

I now find myself eating intuitively without guilt or rules, and I don't get hung up on what I previously perceived as my body's flaws. I appreciate my body rather than berate it. Even though diet culture is still around me, I have no desire to be part of it. I lived it and was miserable. I am forever grateful that I pushed myself to make that appointment with the eating disorder dietitian because I have finally recaptured my mental and physical health. With that, my happiness returned and I now look forward to enjoying my life without the burden of a diet.

All The Best,  
Deborah Raphael  
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# What Is This Intuitive Eating You Speak Of?



If you see or hear the word “diet”, there is a definition of sorts that may come to mind. Feelings may pop up as well when you are exposed to that word. And I'm not talking about the definition that indicates the types of food you consume. I'm talking about diet as in my-New-Year's-Resolution-is-to-go-on-a-diet kind of diet. If the word “diet” exists, then there should be an opposite concept, right? Well, what would be the antonym for “diet”?

Because I'm a nerd, I did some research. I found synonyms quite easily (e.g., “reduce”, “slenderize”, “restriction”, “starvation”, “fast”), but finding an antonym was elusive. This tells me that dieting is something that has been created with a purpose in mind. I believe this purpose is related to money. If you don't believe me, let's take a look at Weight Watchers<sup>1</sup> revenue from 2016<sup>2</sup>. They made \$267 million dollars! That's right. They made \$267,000,000<sup>3</sup> by promising people that they could lose weight by following their specific program...and, of course, by paying a monthly or weekly fee and purchasing their products. You may still believe that the diet industry is not fueled by money, but I personally find it hard to believe.

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<sup>1</sup> I'm going to pick on Weight Watchers because I fell for their trap!

<sup>2</sup> Thanks for the info, pnewswire.com!

<sup>3</sup> It looks like so much more money when I write it out!

Back to my original question: “What would be the antonym for dieting?” Essentially, there isn't one. “Dieting” is just the term that indicates a state of being that goes against our natural relationship with food. The Intuitive Eating authors, Resch & Tribole, state that this approach to food “provides a new way of eating”. I agree that it will be new for most people because all they know is dieting and don't remember a time when dieting wasn't part of their lives. But is it *really* new? I would argue that it's not. It's just that we were hit with dieting and everything that goes along with it at such a young age that now it's just the status quo. IE is about reclaiming and reconnecting with our own inner wisdom and our bodies. Resch & Tribole adds to the previous statement by saying that “Intuitive Eating<sup>4</sup> provides a new way of eating that is ultimately struggle-free and healthy for your mind and body. It is a process that unleashes the shackles of dieting...It means getting back to your roots---trusting your body and its signals”. I don't know about you, but that has a certain appeal to me.

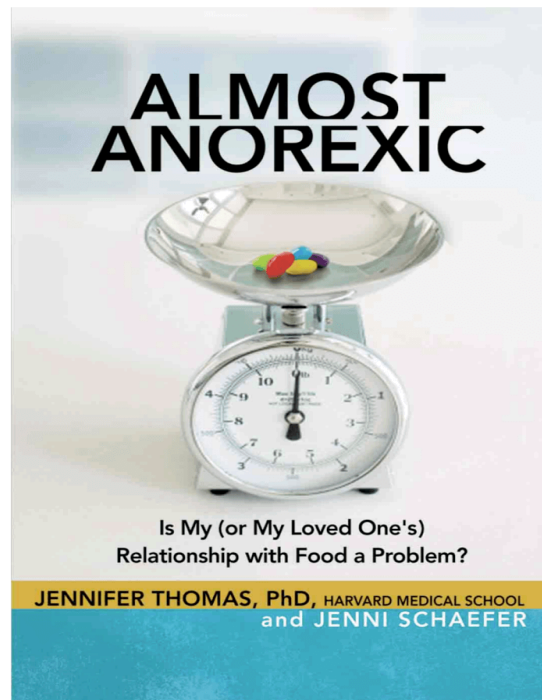
To me, IE is really about rewinding and getting back to a time in your life when you approached food and your body in a way that was natural. No infant goes about her day thinking about how many calories are in an ounce of breast milk, how many calories she burns if she wails for 20 minutes, or if her onesie makes her look fat. She cries for food when she's hungry and pushes away the breast or bottle when she's done. IE is about getting back in touch with that connection to your basic inner signals and eating based on your instinct and intuition rather than on outside influences.

IE is not a diet. It is the opposite of dieting. I found IE when I had simply had it with dieting and was looking for some sanity. You may find yourself in a similar situation. If you do, open your mind to IE. It's not an easy path, but it's a path worth exploring.

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<sup>4</sup> I will refer to Intuitive Eating as IE because, to be honest, I'm a lazy typist.

# Almost In Denial



I had two major “Ah-ha!” moments in my recovery. The first one occurred as I was browsing the psychology section at my local Half-Price bookstore. I was looking for some books for my job as a school psychologist when Almost Anorexic caught my eye. I flipped through it and, although some parts intrigued me, I put it back on the shelf. Then I picked it up again. I thought to myself, “There is no way I'm anorexic. I'm just healthy and lean!” But when I had scanned through the book, I did see myself in some of the personal stories. I did obsesses about my body, food, and exercise. I decided to make the purchase. At the time, I told myself that I didn't know why I was buying the book. I was not anorexic. Now that I look back, this book called to me for a reason. I think my subconscious knew something that my conscious mind didn't.

Apprehensively, I started reading the book. I told myself that I would be open-minded about what I read because maybe, just maybe, I have a teeny issue with food. Right off the bat in chapter one, I had to face this head-on. There was a screener called the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) which wouldn't diagnose anything but would let me know if I needed to speak to a professional. I was totally honest with myself as I took this screener. *“I am terrified about being overweight” Always. “Other people think that I'm too thin” Usually. “I am aware of the calorie content of the foods that I eat” Always.*

When I was done with the screener, I had to calculate my total score and, if it was over 20, I should consider seeking out the help of a professional. As I did the math, my inner Deborah chuckled nervously and said, “There is no way my score will be over 20. Okay, maybe a little, but I certainly don't have a eating disorder!” My score was a 33. To put it simply, I was stunned. Sure, it wasn't the maximum score, but it was a lot higher than I had expected.

I let this information sink in for a bit and decided that this was something that I should take seriously. I sat down with my husband a few nights later and confessed what was going on with me. I shared my screener results with him and that it might be best if I go to my general practitioner to see if I needed to look into this further. He didn't disagree with me. I made the doctor's appointment and my husband accompanied me when the time came. I optimistically hoped that my doctor would brush off the screener and tell me that I was fine, but I ended up being labeled as “underweight” and told to see a dietitian and a therapist.

Okay. So, I had an eating issue. Did I have an eating disorder though? I guess it depends on who you ask. My dietitian said it wasn't anorexia while my therapist gave me the diagnosis of Unspecified Eating Disorder for insurance purposes. I hated having a label slapped on me even if it was the very vague “unspecified eating disorder” rather than the harsh “anorexia” label, but there was something amiss and I couldn't ignore it any longer.

I eventually went through recovery with the help of my dietitian, my therapist, and, of course, my husband. I had naively thought that since everyone diets, then there must be nothing wrong with my behavior. Almost Anorexic<sup>5</sup> taught me otherwise. As scary and difficult as it was to go through the book, it also drew me in. As I got further and further into the book, I could see myself reflected in each chapter and knew that I needed to take action in some way. Was it easy? Hell no, but I'm grateful that I stumbled upon this book that one fateful day because I hate to imagine how far I would have traveled down the disordered eating path without it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As a side note, I want to mention that this book talks about all eating disorders and not just anorexia.

<sup>6</sup> Epilogue: I retook the EAT-26 screener a little over a year later and I'm happy to report that my total score had dropped all the way down to a 6!

# Take This Diet and Shove It!



My mother is a fan of country music, so this meant that I grew up in the 1980's listening to the local country radio station<sup>7</sup>. I remember every Friday, promptly at 5 pm, the radio station would play Johnny Paycheck's "Take This Job and Shove It" followed immediately by The Judds' "Girls' Night Out". You may be wondering why I bring this up. What do these two songs have to do with dieting? No worries, this will make sense in a few paragraphs!

I was suckered into Weight Watchers and dove right into the dieting world. Sure, I had a diet mentality before that, but it really piled on when I started Weight Watchers. My dieting slowly increased which meant I ate less and less over time. It not only affected my physical health but my mental health as well. It got to the point where I just got so tired of being hungry, feeling pressured to exercise more and more, of being told what types of food to eat, how much to eat, and when to eat, and simply being mentally exhausted from managing every part of my diet. I hit diet bottom. I was DONE being manipulated by the media. I was being told that I had to be tall, blond, thin, and tanned. I was dealt a certain genetic hand and my body wanted to work within those parameters. I was fighting that by dieting. I cannot change my shoe size any more than I can change my body shape and size, and yet I was being told that I should look like a Victoria's Secret model.

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<sup>7</sup> KSAN, 94.9!

So what does "Take This Job and Shove It", a song about eloquently quitting a job, and "Girls' Night Out", a song about basking in the freedom of the weekend, have to do with dieting? Well, I essentially told myself that it was time to take this diet and *shove* it. I had had it with all of the aspects of dieting and yearned for the freedom of food choice again. I yearned for the simple pleasure of eating and exercising without it being constantly linked to calories consumed, calories burned, body fat percentage, and that pesky number on the scale. I yearned to eat and exercise for enjoyment and because it makes me feel good physically and mentally. I yearned for an approach to food and movement that was like a toddler's. I yearned to get back to a place where I ate and exercised intuitively.

Though Johnny Paycheck may not be your inspiration, I hope someone or something inspires you to tell your diet to shove it!

# How Long Does It Take To Become an Intuitive Eater?



As the moderator of the intuitive eating community forum, I notice that newcomers have a lot of questions. This is normal. They are exploring a new way of looking at food and their bodies, so a certain amount of uncertainty is to be expected. They want to know if they will struggle with diet mentality forever, so one of the most common questions is “How long does IE take?” If you are reading this, I assume you have the same question. Wanting to know a time frame for such an undertaking is understandable, but, unfortunately, there isn't a clear-cut answer.

There are many factors that go into how long it may take you to become an intuitive eater. First of all, I believe you have to be ready to hear the message of IE. I was ready for it when I bottomed out in June 2015. Three years before that, no way! I was all about what the scale said and fitting into the smallest sized pants possible. It wasn't until my



misery outweighed my desire to be thin that I was open to the concept of IE.

If you feel you are at a point to embrace intuitive eating, here are few key points to keep in mind.

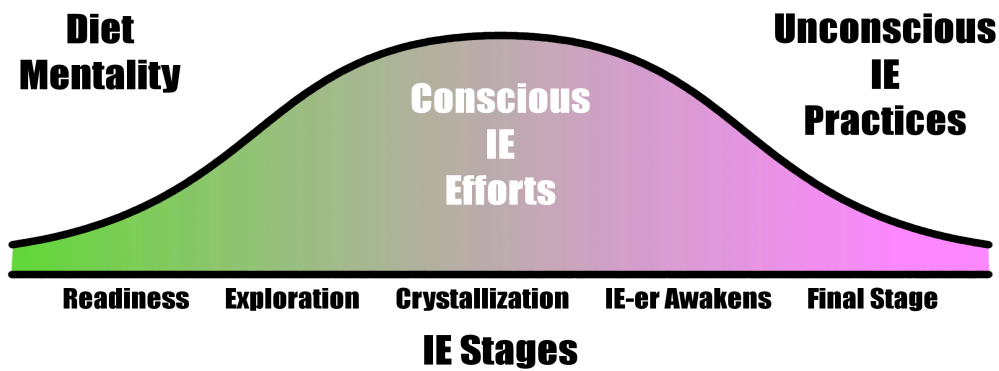
1. You may think that you need to learn IE. Remember that we are all born intuitive eaters, so approach it as unlearning dieting rather than learning IE.
2. Implementing the principles will be a slow process. You've been dieting for a long time and reversing that damage doesn't happen overnight. You have many years of dieting to undo, so give yourself the gift of time.
3. Take into consideration how long you've been dieting and if there are any other challenges that are present in your life right now. If you've been dieting for 3 decades and are going through an ugly divorce, it's likely you'll need more time to feel comfortable with IE compared to someone who has been dieting for 5 years and has only minor life stressors.
4. You might believe that you won't ever fully recover from disordered eating, so you may as well go back to that way of thinking. This is very black-and-white.<sup>8</sup> I don't think that recovery means that you'll never have a disordered thought cross your mind again. It just means that those thoughts won't dominate your life. I think I will always be on my toes to a certain degree, but I now have more tools in my toolbox to silence those negative thoughts.
5. Cognitive dissonance can throw a wrench into things. This is the uncomfortable feeling that results from having two conflicting thoughts or when a behavior conflicts with your beliefs. Diet mentality tells us one thing, but we know that intuitive eating is the path we want to take. When this happens we have an internal conflict. *I want to diet! But I hate dieting!* The good news is that this conflict lessens with time.
6. Intuitive eating is not a linear process. Our culture oozes diet mentality and it's easy to get sucked back in, so taking one step forward and two steps back<sup>9</sup> is part of the journey. Just don't give up and think baby steps!
7. You may be someone like me who wants to be in control and any changes in your life makes you uneasy. Going from dieting to IE is a drastic change. Change is a natural part of life though and resisting will only prolong the stressful experience. When I relaxed and learned to trust my body, everything became easier.<sup>10</sup>
8. I once worked with a high school student who amazed me with this quote: "Don't compare your page one to someone else's page twenty". Everyone is at a different stage in their IE journey, so please don't feel pressured to be as far along as the next person. You can't master the the piano in a week. IE is no different.

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<sup>8</sup> I'm a black-and-white thinker, so you are not alone! I am constantly working on making my thinking more grey.

<sup>9</sup> Or even 3 or 4 steps back!

<sup>10</sup> I know, easier said than done, right!?



9. This visual of the IE stages<sup>11</sup> may help you see the big picture. Newcomers in the Readiness and Exploration stage are on the left side. Diet mentality takes up a lot of their energy and there are very few intuitive eating thoughts and actions (green). When they reach the Crystallization stage, diet mentality won't be as present in their lives and there will be recognizable behavior changes (green becomes purple). When they reach the Awake and the Final Stage, their intuitive eating will become more natural (purple).

So, how long does IE take? A wise woman on the intuitive eating forum once said that she would give one month of genuine IE effort for every year of dieting. Although everyone is different, I think this is a good general guideline. For me, it took about a year to feel better mentally and physically and to reach my natural weight. But honestly, I don't think anyone is ever "done" with their IE journey because recovery is not a set destination. Things come our way and we may need to adjust the role IE plays in our lives based on the new parameters. Disordered eating is about control, but IE is about flexibility and that includes adapting IE to meet your needs as a unique individual. Maybe a food you used to love is no longer appreciated by your body anymore. Maybe you are diagnosed with a medical condition that requires you to look at foods differently.<sup>12</sup> I believe that intuitive eating evolves as we go about our lives and as long as we listen to our bodies, we are eating intuitively.

<sup>11</sup> If you need a refresher on the stages of IE, check out chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup> I recently had to limit my bran flakes cereal consumption because it is a possible culprit in causing kidney-stone-producing crystals in my urine. I would prefer to not pass a kidney stone, so bye-bye bran flakes.