

Emotional Hunger vs. Physical Hunger

Physical hunger is the feeling you have (usually in your belly) when your body genuinely needs to eat. Emotional hunger is any type of hunger you feel when your body doesn't actually need food.

Emotional hunger can feel physical, too. Because of this, many of us have been mistaking emotional hunger for physical hunger for years. The good news is that it's totally possible to learn to distinguish between them!

It's very normal to find this tricky at first. Keep paying attention to the sensations in your body and you'll soon start to tease out the differences.

Three good questions to ask yourself when you notice yourself feeling hungry are:

- What does this hunger feel like in my body?
- What am I really needing?
- What happens if I wait 5 minutes?

HOW TO LOSE WEIGHT FOR THE LAST TIME

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Signs of Emotional & Physical Hunger

EMOTIONAL HUNGER

“Wow! I’m so hungry!” – sudden hunger or feeling ravenous suggests it’s emotional hunger.

It could be experienced in the belly but will be in a slightly different location or feel different from physical hunger. If the feeling is elsewhere in the body (e.g. chest, face, mouth, or throat) that suggests it’s emotional hunger.

Cravings for particular foods (e.g. sweet or salty foods) are likely to be emotional hunger.

“I need to eat something right now” – emotional hunger can feel like an emergency to solve.

If you’re eating nutritious meals (including healthy fats) but getting hungry within 2-3 hours of eating your meal, it’s likely to be emotional hunger.

Can be triggered by habit, boredom, frustration, disappointment, anxiety, desire – or any other emotion.

PHYSICAL HUNGER

True physical hunger tends to come on slowly and gradually.

Typically centered over your stomach (upper left-hand area of your belly), often with a growling, gnawing, or hollow feeling.

Feels like it could be solved with simple food like a plate of green vegetables or a plain chicken breast.

“I’d like to eat soon, but it’s not an emergency” – if you don’t eat right away, true physical hunger will generally recede as your body accesses its fat stores. Physical hunger tends to come and go in waves.

If you are eating nutritious meals and avoiding processed foods (like flour and sugar) you’re unlikely to experience true physical hunger within 2-3 hours of eating a meal.

Physical hunger is physiological and not a response to emotions.