



Finding Confidence in Your Food Choices

by Dalton Williams, MA, RD

We've all been there, trying to figure out what to make for dinner this week, overwhelmed by the many narratives, opinions and messages we've encountered about "healthy foods." Over time, we can take different parts of things we've heard and create restrictive dietary patterns that make us question everything we eat and sometimes increase the food noise throughout the day. Removing this stigma and these restrictions can give us the opportunity to love the food we eat, reconnect with our bodies and create sustainable habits that support our overall health.

Everyone eats, which means everyone develops habits around food and eating. Where habits are formed, opinions and thoughts follow. Some people are well-intentioned with their opinions, while others are trying to sell their opinions by demonizing others. These different narratives from loved ones, people on social media and healthcare providers all influence how we see and interact with food. We take bits and pieces from all these sources and add our own preferences to create our own dietary story. Sometimes the story we've built around food leaves us feeling stuck or frustrated.

" Here's the secret: There is no single optimal way of eating. There is only the nutritional pattern that works for you and your life. "

Common examples:

- *A family member tells you to cut carbs because it worked for them.*
- *A provider mentions a low-fat diet for heart health.*
- *A social media personality says they avoid all processed foods and offers a discount code for supplements.*

When all of these collide, it's easy to feel confused.

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These narratives often assign moral value to food, labeling foods as either "good" or "bad." When this happens, we can start demonizing certain foods or entire food groups. This can create unnecessary restrictions on foods we enjoy and foods that can actually improve our health.

This all-or-nothing mentality can sometimes feel easier than practicing moderation. Moderation and balance sometimes require intentionality with our food choices rather than completely avoiding certain foods. Swinging from avoiding entire food groups to "giving up" and promising to start again next week takes a great deal of emotional and mental energy.



These rigid patterns can be an exhausting space to live in and often lead to burnout or unsustainable habits. When these patterns consistently run in the background as we try to make decisions about our health and don't see the results we hoped for, it can feel like we're spinning our wheels. The goals we set for ourselves can start to feel out of reach.

It's easy to turn that frustration inward and feel like we're never doing the right thing. This creates a cycle: We try to do the "right" thing with our dietary patterns, fall into unsustainable restrictions, become frustrated and go looking for a new pattern. Then the cycle starts over.

Over time, this cycle can become exhausting. The goal is to break it by choosing sustainable options, giving yourself grace with food choices, challenging the myth of food morality and creating room for all the foods you want to enjoy.

Giving yourself grace for food choices is a great place to start. This may look like enjoying a slice of cake at a summer wedding or a hamburger at a cookout or restaurant. Giving yourself grace means not tearing yourself down because of the food you choose to enjoy.

Challenging the myth of food morality means understanding there is room for all foods on our plate. Carbohydrates give us energy. Unsaturated fats support many bodily processes. Protein helps with recovery and muscle strength. When we assign moral values to these building blocks, it becomes harder to nourish ourselves well.

We want to create sustainable views and patterns that honor our bodies with foods that are both enjoyable and nourishing. In practice, this starts with a few foundational habits: honoring your body's cues, approaching new nutrition information with a critical eye, making intentional food choices and knowing when to reach out to a professional.

Honoring your body's hunger and satiety cues is an important foundation for building confidence in your food choices. This is something we can do no matter where we are or what food is in front of us. The goal is to listen to your hunger cues and eat to the point of satisfaction, avoiding that overly stuffed feeling.

This can look different for everyone, but tuning in gives us the freedom to enjoy a variety of delicious foods. If this feels difficult at first, that's completely normal. Years of following external rules about when, what and how much to eat can dull those internal signals over time. Rebuilding that awareness is a process, not a switch you flip overnight. The goal isn't perfection. It's simply paying attention and giving yourself credit for trying.

Slowing down during meals is an important part of this practice as well. It gives your body time to send the signals that tell you when you're satisfied, and it helps you enjoy the people and atmosphere around you. Meals have been a place for gathering throughout human history, and connecting to the moment can make eating that much more enjoyable.

Whether it's a cookout with family or a favorite patio restaurant, listening to your body's cues gives you flexibility in many different situations.

When we're at these gatherings, there may be discussion of a new fad diet or something someone read online. Approaching new nutrition information can be a challenge, especially when it comes from people we love and trust.

Questions to Ask About Nutrition Advice

Before changing your eating habits, consider:

- Does this advice exclude an entire food group?
- Does it use all-or-nothing language?
- Is someone trying to sell me something?
- Is the information coming from a Registered Dietitian or another qualified health professional?

These questions can help separate helpful guidance from nutrition noise.

When we can distinguish helpful dietary advice from noise, we can start making more intentional food choices that align with our goals.



This may look like building a plate with foods you enjoy, foods that support your health and foods you're craving.

For example, you might split an entrée with someone while on a beach vacation and then walk the boardwalk for ice cream afterward. This is what breaking the restriction cycle actually looks like in real life: not a perfect plate, but a chosen one.

When food decisions come from your own preferences and goals rather than fear or external rules, they become sustainable in a way that no diet ever could. That shift in mindset, from following a plan to trusting yourself, is where lasting change begins. The goal is to make choices you enjoy that also align with your goals.

The Bottom Line

Building confidence in your food choices is not a linear process. It takes time, and that's okay. The most important step is the next one, not the one a mile down the road.

That's why it's important to remember to:

- Give yourself grace throughout the process
- Challenge narratives that promote an all-or-nothing mentality
- Listen to your body's hunger and satiety cues
- Confidently choose foods you enjoy that also align with your goals

There is a great deal of nutrition information and advice that is fueled by stigma and bias. By challenging these narratives, we can create sustainable patterns and confidently enjoy the foods we want to enjoy.

About the Author:

Dalton Williams, MA, RD, is a registered dietitian with the UT Southwestern Weight Wellness Clinic. He focuses on helping patients build positive relationships with food and understand the role of physical activity in overall health. He has a particular interest in the intersection of nutrition and the evolving landscape of obesity care, and how that intersection creates meaningful outcomes for both clinicians and patients.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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