

Be Your Own Valentine

Happy Valentine's Day! Now here's your heart-shaped sugar bomb. Like most American holidays, Valentine's Day is celebrated with food, which causes challenges for those of us who try to maintain a healthy diet. At times it can seem like holidays are designed to break every healthy eating rule there is, which can spur the back and forth inner dialogue of, "You deserve this! Treat yourself" and "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels. Spring Break is coming!" We tell ourselves that holidays require more willpower and that reminding ourselves of our goals of healthy eating or weight loss will be enough to keep us on track.

You may be surprised to hear that these conventionally held strategies are not the answer. No matter how subtle it is, being at battle with yourself and using your energy for avoidance is exhausting. However, being compassionate with yourself and accepting your choices is energizing and will get you through the day so you can treat yourself without the agonizing guilt trip later.



The Ellyn Satter

Institute's Eating Competence Model suggests that instead of keeping score of how well you're eating compared to the rules, that you should "base your eating on your body's natural processes: hunger and the drive to survive, appetite and the need for pleasure, the social reward of sharing food, and the tendency to maintain preferred and stable body weight.¹" The simplicity of Eating Competence is empowering because it encourages a healthy relationship with food and acknowledges that we do eat not simply for nutrition, but also for social connection and pleasure.

The Eating Competence Model encourages our connection with food rather than avoiding it. The more mindfully we eat, the more we enjoy our food, and the more satisfied we would be without overindulging. Here are the main components of the model:

- "Have rewarding, regular, and reliable meals
- Pay attention while you eat
- Then eat what and how much you want¹"

These simple guidelines empower you to have a healthy relationship with food that is sustainable from social, psychological, and health perspectives. No burning out on a strict diet to then feast on anything and everything with sugar, fat, and salt because that's what you were craving the whole time. No going through restrictive

cleanses to then just go back to your old habits that made you want to cleanse in the first place. Instead of falling prey to possibly disordered eating behaviors, we are free to make choices and to compassionately accept them. Go ahead, have that delicious chocolate cupcake with pink frosting and red sprinkles. Enjoy every bite!

For more about eating competently (and for research backing up this advice), see Ellyn Satter's *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family: How to Eat, How to Raise Good Eaters, How to Cook*, Kelcy Press, 2008. Also see www.EllynSatterInstitute.org/store to purchase books and to review other resources.

Image Credit: Hungry Happenings: Festive Food for Special Occassions
<http://www.hungryhappenings.com/2013/01/conversation-heart-fudge-sweet.html>