

Using the Family Dinner Model to a Food Neutral Mentality

by Laura Cipullo, RD, CDE, CEDRD, RYT June 1, 2017

You sit down to eat dinner with the family. Perhaps you think my due diligence is done – I can now check off “family dinners” on my “Good Parenting List.” Is this true? Is eating together the answer to raising healthy and happy eaters? As with anything, it depends, and of course, differs for each child and/or family. However, in general dinner conversation, food served and food eaten affects our children’s relationship with food and body. Use the family dinner as an opportunity to create a neutral food and body mentality.



The Family Dinner

Have you said?

Oh, I can't eat dessert; it goes straight to my thighs?

We only get the bad stuff on weekends.

Since you behaved at the doctor's office, you earned your after dinner dessert.

Reframe and ask –

Are you hungry for dessert?

Are you eating a variety of foods throughout the entire week?

Are you proud of your behavior today?

What happens at your dinner table? What messages have you intentionally or unintentionally relayed to your children? Is dinnertime a positive time to share stories from the day or a tense gathering with arguing? Do you and your spouse make comments about each other's food choices? Is there a power struggle surrounding food quantities? If your child asks for seconds, do you oblige or tell them they need to watch their weight? Is your

TV turned on? Has food been labeled as good or bad? Do you currently label food as healthy or unhealthy? What foods do you serve yourself versus the children? Are all three macronutrients – carbohydrates, proteins, and fats served to each dinner guest? Do all children get to choose the same sides? The answers to these questions likely affect how your child views food and their own body. However, it is not necessarily their experience of the food with their body. Rather, it is your judgment imposed on them. Think about using the dinner meal as an opportunity to neutralize food and even body for you and your whole family.

Neutral Food

Webster's dictionary defines neutral as "not engaged on either side; *specifically*: not aligned with a political or ideological grouping."

(https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/neutral?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld) In regards to food, this means not aligning foods in good or bad groupings. It also means not even aligning foods in healthy versus unhealthy groupings. And the same goes for the body. There is no right or wrong body. This means fat is not right or wrong or good or bad.

When specifically applying this neutral mindset to food, one attempts to be mindful without judgment. Instead of judging which food is better for you or your child by choosing "healthy" or "good" foods, you can make observations and then draw conclusions.

First, rid food of labels noting value or morals. Ideally, an apple is an apple and chocolate is chocolate. We eat foods, meals, and snacks. Foods are carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. They break down to carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and fatty acids. There are no treats, food rewards, or food decisions based on "deserving."

If you must categorize food, consider acting like a scientist and quantifying a food's nutrient density based on objective (not subjective) measures rather than an adjective such as good or bad. A food can have a high, average, or low nutrient density. This is based on the amount of macronutrients, micronutrients, processing, and other additives in a specific size or portion of food. Just because one food is denser than another, it does not mean that said food is better or worse for your overall health. For example, a runner may need a food with a low nutrient density such as cane sugar to provide a quick source of

fuel for their muscles, while a tween whose body is readying for puberty may need a nutrient dense food or snack before taking high school entrance exams to help sustain focus. There may also be times when you eat a food just because you want it regardless of its nutritional density.

After removing the value judgments from food, you can further neutralize food through mindfulness. Eat the food mindfully using the five senses and then observe if and how it energized you; if and for how long it helped you to remain full; what purpose it served. Sometimes, you need food for fuel and at other times you may want food for hedonic, emotional, or behavioral reasons. You can choose to eat different foods at different times for different reasons. The choice is that of the individual.

When determining if a food works for your mind, body, and spirit, ask yourself and or your child the following questions after you/they have eaten it without judgment. This will help you/them determine which foods work best with your/their mind, body, and spirit, and at what specific times.

- ***Did the food provide even energy? A burst of energy? No noticeable difference?***
- ***Did the food increase your fatigue? Eliminate your fatigue? Have no affect?***
- ***Did the food sustain you for one hour, two hours, three hours, or more?***
- ***Did the food meet the purpose (taste, satisfy, sate...)?***

If possible, make dinner meals, especially the first few minutes, peaceful, free of distractions like arguing and TV, so that you and your children can be engaged in the process of the eating mindfully to begin learning what works and/or doesn't work for the mind, body, and spirit. Starting from a neutral place with neutral foods can pave the way to having a positive mind, body, and eating experience.

About the author:

Laura Cipullo is a Registered Dietitian, Certified Diabetes Educator, Certified Eating Disorder Registered Dietitian and four-time author, with offices in NYC, NY and Closter, NJ.

Laura is the founder of Laura Cipullo [Whole Nutrition Services](#) in NYC and most recently opened Bergen Country's **L'ifestyle Lounge (a Yoga, Mindfulness and Nutrition Self-Care Center) in Closter, NJ where she and her team teach clients how to eat ALL foods guilt-free and how to live mindfully. Laura weaves evidence-based science into treating her clients and her approach combines her credentialed expertise in:**

- Nutrition
- Behavior Change
- The endocrine system
- Psychology

While she believes in organic, sustainable foods the majority of the time, her clients love her compassionate, mindful, 'wholistic' approach to *positive nutrition*. Her motto is "Eat Kale and Cupcakes!" The practice provides individual, couples and family nutrition sessions, as well as weekly '[mindful meal](#)' support groups for clients who want to change their relationship with food and their body.

An expert in nutrition and healthy living, Laura has almost 20 years of clinical experience as a **Registered Dietitian, Certified Diabetes Educator, and Certified Eating Disorder Registered Dietitian**. For three years, Laura volunteered as President, New York chapter of the **International Association of Eating Disorders Professionals** (www.iaedpNY.com), and under her leadership, grew the chapter from 20 members to almost 200 members. In May 2016, Laura earned her 200hrs **Registered Yoga Teacher** status at LifePower Yoga and now offers private yoga and mindfulness sessions in her [NYC office](#).

This spring Laura's fourth book, "Everyday Diabetes, Meals for 1 or 2" (Robert Rose, March 2017) was published.

The book is a joint effort between Laura and her colleague, Lisa Mikus, RD, a member of Laura's practice. Together, they have whipped up 150 diabetes-friendly recipes for singles and couples. The recipes are organized into breakfast, lunch and dinner for easy meal planning and are all between 45 and 60 grams of carbohydrate. Laura and Lisa offer these diabetes meal essentials in three chapters, including answers to the most **Frequently Asked Questions** about diabetes.

Her third book, "Women's Health Body Clock Diet" (Rodale, December 2015), utilizes the *positive nutrition* approach that Laura applies in her practice, which is based on the three tenets of her philosophy: science, mindfulness and compassion.

This transformational book is the only book on the market written by a RD, CDE and CEDRD, combining factual endocrine discoveries, nutrition, recipes, and tools to stabilize adverse hormonal fluctuations.

Laura co-authored “Diabetes Comfort Food Diet” (Rodale, 2012) with the editors of *Prevention* magazine. Originally intended only for subscribers, the book was so successful it was reissued by a new publisher three years later (Robert Rose, 2015), and is available at Barnes and Noble, Amazon and local book sellers.

In an effort to promote positive relationships with food and body at an early age, Laura created the lesson book “Healthy Habits,” an eight-week program that teaches adults how to explain nutrition and health to kids using a positive, weight-neutral approach.

Laura’s personal blog, formerly *Mom Dishes It Out*, is an extension of this program, now available at www.LauraCipullo.com.

Laura earned a Bachelor’s of Science in Human Nutrition and Dietetics at Colorado State University. In 1998, she interned at **NewYork–Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center**, and in 1999 through 2005, Laura held the distinguished position of Clinical Dietitian at the hospital. She was the Nutrition Coordinator for CEDAR Associates in Westchester and Rockland counties, and a consultant for the Renfrew Center in NJ and NYC. CEDAR and Renfrew are both outpatient eating disorder treatment facilities. She is consistently tapped by a variety of publications, such as **Fitness, Real Simple Magazine, OK! Magazine, Today’s Dietitian, Diabetes Forecast, Diabetic Living, Women’s Health, The Daily Meal, The Huffington Post, Fox News** and **Everyday Health**. Laura also makes frequent guest appearances on local and national television shows, including **NY’s PIX11 News, Fox & Friends, Headline News**, and several shows on wellness-focused **Z Living TV**.

She and her team are available for speaking engagements and workshops. Laura has spoken at the National Eating Disorder Association’s annual symposium, Binge Eating Disorder Association’s annual symposium, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital Grand Rounds, the New York City Nutrition Education Network and New York University.

After living for 20 years in New York City, Laura and her family moved to the ‘burbs in 2015! Follow her [@LauraCipullo](https://twitter.com/LauraCipullo), [@EatKaleandCupcakes](https://twitter.com/EatKaleandCupcakes), and [@LifestyleLoungeNJ](https://twitter.com/LifestyleLoungeNJ). Laura can be reached by email Laura@LauraCipullo.com and appointments made at www.LauraCipullo.com.