

End Your Suffering Around Food

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End Your Suffering Around Food

**Take This Five Step Challenge
and Change When, What,
Where, How and Why You Eat**



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Women Food and God,
Breaking Free from Emotional Eating,
and *When Food is Love***

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Introduction

When I was eleven, I began dieting, and for the next 17 years I spent the largest part of every day thinking about what I wanted to eat that I shouldn't and what I should eat that I didn't want.

In my heyday of emotional eating, I snuck and hid food, scavenged the garbage for it, threw it up, starved myself of it – and hated myself the entire time.

*"I was a lunatic
with food and now
I am not."*

I went on every diet I heard of or read about: the prunes-and-meatball diet, the one-hot-fudge-sundae-a-day diet, the applesauce-and-chicken-wing diet, Atkin's, Stillman's, and Weight Watchers. I lost weight on all of them – usually I spent three weeks losing ten pounds and four days gaining it back. But gaining the weight back (often with a bonus of two or three pounds) wasn't the worst part. The worst part was how much I suffered through all of it.

If there's one refrain I hear constantly from people who are struggling with food, it's that they too want this to be over, done, kaput. They want to wake up thin tomorrow and spend the rest of their life without a food problem. Yup, I understand. Been there.

If a wish-granting genie had appeared during those 17 years I was gaining and losing a thousand pounds, I would've said, "Take 50 pounds off my body immediately and make me thin. When I wake up tomorrow, let me eat ice cream without guilt and munch potato chips without seeing them on my hips within 10 minutes." I wanted your basic miracle. Just one teeny miracle.

But let me tell you the good news about that wish: **It's entirely possible to break free from emotional eating.** You can be someone who walks around without thoughts of food occupying the main portion of your mental life.

I stopped dieting when I was twenty-eight. I stopped dieting because the pain of what I was doing to myself was greater than the fear of being fat for the rest of my life. I stopped dieting because I was suicidal. **I stopped dieting because not one diet worked.**

I decided to instead invest my time and energy in acting on a positive vision of myself – the sane, powerful me I sensed was waiting in the wings. Every day I would wake up and feel the pull to go back to what I had been doing before: dieting, bingeing, agonizing. And every day, I would tell myself that change was possible and that I was following a new plan; I was eating when I was hungry, stopping when I'd had enough, and keeping written track of my food intake, hunger levels, and feelings before and after I ate. By paying attention in this way, my relationship with food permanently changed.

Not only did I lose weight, but I began to believe – because I experienced it directly – that I was worthy of self respect, and that left to my own devices, I would not chomp my way clear across the United States.

I was a lunatic with food and now I am not. And in the past forty years, I have worked with and witnessed tens of thousands of people as they move from being utterly out of control of their eating to feeling as if they can leave a box of cookies untouched for weeks at a time.

You too can end your suffering around food.

This E-Book is broken down into five challenges designed to help you reset your patterns around food. And for each challenge, you'll also learn Action Steps you can take to put into practice what you just learned. Using those Action Steps are key to making the changes you want for your life.

Challenge #1: Learn How to Hear Your Hunger ... the signals your body gives you to let you know when it wants to eat.

Challenge #2: Decide What You Want to Eat ... and what foods "hum" when you eat them.

Challenge #3: Drop the Distractions ... why, where, and how you eat are as important as what you eat.

Challenge #4: Stop When You've Had Enough ... because the difference between hunger and enough can be just a bite or two.

Challenge #5: What to Do in the Middle of a Binge ... when you find yourself knee-deep in food and frantic.

There are always exquisitely good reasons we turn to food when we aren't hungry – and our work is to develop a kinder, wiser relationship not only with food but also with ourselves. It means being willing to consider and then explore how we use food in our lives. It means treating ourselves with compassion, and understanding that the point isn't to arrive at some imagined destination but to have a transformative, fascinating, fabulous time arriving. And arriving and arriving.

Make a commitment now to read the entire E-Book. It won't take long. And then consider joining me for the Women Food and God Online Retreat, May 16-21, where you'll **join me LIVE online to learn more about changing what, where, when, how and why you eat!**

Challenge #1

Learn How to Hear Your Hunger

By the time I was twenty-eight, I knew how many calories were in any food. I knew how to lose weight and how to gain weight. I knew how to diet and how to binge. But I didn't know when I was hungry or that it was okay to be hungry.

When we diet, we are taught to ignore hunger. We learn that someone else knows better and that if we listen to what they tell us to eat, we will have the body we want.

When we give up dieting, we take back something we were often too young to know we had given away: our own voice. Our ability to make decisions about what to eat and when.

Part of breaking free is going from not listening to listening. Or from listening-to-everyone-else to listening-to-yourself. And trusting what you hear.

Most of the time we eat in response to our minds. **The first step to breaking free from compulsive eating is to eat when you are hungry.**

You begin eating when you are hungry by letting yourself get hungry. When you are accustomed to eating in anticipation of hunger, making the transition to eating when you are hungry may require some time.

Here are a few ways to start hearing your hunger, which I'll be talking about in depth during our upcoming May 2023 Online Retreat:

- **Keep a chart of what you ate, when you ate, and whether or not you were hungry before you ate.** How often do you eat when you are hungry? Do you know what hunger feels like?
- **Don't eat at your regular mealtimes for a day or two.** Watch what happens. Are you anticipating your hunger?
- **Pay careful attention to the bodily sensations that you recognize as hunger.** Where in your body do you experience hunger? In your throat? Your chest? Your stomach? Your legs?
- **When you've decided you are hungry, rate your hunger on a scale of 1 to 10:** 1 is ravenous/very hungry, 5 is satisfied, and 10 is stuffed/uncomfortable. Notice the number at which you feel most comfortable eating and the point at which your hunger is uncomfortable.

"Part of breaking free is going from not listening to listening."

Challenge #2

Decide What You Want to Eat

One of the reasons it's terrifying for compulsive eaters to believe we can eat what we want and not become obese is that we think we want so much. We feel bottomless, as if we could never get enough.

A balance exists, however, between not depriving yourself of the food you want when you are hungry and using food to make up for all the other ways you feel deprived. All the ways you can't have what you want.

Eating what you want gets translated to eating whenever you want regardless of your hunger. The diet authorities must be right, we tell ourselves. We cannot lose weight by listening to ourselves. We cannot be trusted.

Trust develops and builds when you give yourself a choice. Trust develops when you choose to make yourself comfortable, not miserable, to take care of yourself rather than hurt yourself.

When you decide to eat, the question to ask yourself is, "**Where is the desire for this particular food coming from?**"

First, forget about calories. After years of counting calories and being told what to eat, we have evolved a rigid definition of what is permissible to eat and what is not. As long as there is a voice of "not allowed," as long as there are foods you feel you shouldn't eat, you create struggle and conflict. As long as there is struggle, there is bingeing. And as long as there is bingeing, there is fear about eating what you want.

When you let go of the struggle by allowing yourself choice about what you eat, you let go of one end of the rope on which you have been tugging and straining. When you let go of your side, the rope immediately falls to the ground.

When you eat what you want, when you drop the rope and end the struggle between right foods and wrong foods, you will eventually (after your first tendency to eat more than what you truly want) consume fewer calories than you did when you were guided by caloric content.

When you are hungry, sit down for a minute or two and ask yourself what your body (not your mind) really wants to eat. If no answer comes, either visually or verbally, ask yourself a variety of questions about textures, taste, and temperatures. You'll get a much clearer answer to what will satisfy your hunger.

Stay in the present moment with yourself. Whenever you notice yourself planning meals around what you should or shouldn't eat, or even around what you might want to eat, you are creating a set of expectations for yourself. When you eat what you thought you wanted yesterday and it doesn't satisfy you today, you'll go looking for more food.

If it doesn't hum to you, don't eat it. We eat to satisfy emotional as well as physical needs, and unless both are acknowledged and dealt with, we are setting ourselves up to feel deprived and go hunting for more food.

Foods that hum to you are foods that satisfy you both emotionally and physically because they fit the hunger of the moment. When you eat a humming food, you don't go looking for more food fifteen minutes or an hour later. You forget about food.

Foods that beckon are ones that draw you near, but because its attractiveness originates externally and does not correspond to a specific need or desire for that food, it is not satisfying. When you eat a beckoning food, it's difficult to know when to stop because there isn't anything but the sight or smell or taste of it telling you to begin. When the hunger for food is absent, so is the signal that tells you to stop.

"If you don't know what you want to eat, it's time to find out."

How often do you eat foods that you really want?

If the thought of eating what you want is overwhelming, begin very slowly, one meal at a time. Don't create rules like, "I should always eat what I want"; rather, give yourself permission to eat what you want once a day. Be guided by what feels intuitively right to you (and this you will discover by experience) instead of what you think you should or shouldn't be doing. You'll find yourself slowly discovering foods you and your body actually want. What foods energize you, awaken you, sustain you.

If you don't know what your body wants to eat, it's time to find out.

ACTION STEP: What does your body want to eat?

When you are hungry, sit down for thirty seconds or a minute and ask yourself:

Do I want something ... sweet, sour, salty, spicy, or bland?

Do I want something ... smooth, crunchy, creamy, noisy?

Do I want something ... hot, at room temperature, or something cold to eat or drink?

See what answers come up in the moment. You'll have a much better idea of what your body (not your mind) wants than if you open the refrigerator to see what's there.

Learn more about food that hums to you during our November 2023 Online Retreat.

Challenge #3

Drop the Distractions

Where you eat and how you eat is as important as what you eat.

Although most of us who are compulsive eaters say we love food, most of us distract ourselves from what we are eating, oblivious to how it tastes, smells, feels in our body. But when you love something, you pay attention to it.

We believe we're not really eating – it doesn't count -- if we are:

- at the stove cooking, tasting;
- standing in front of the refrigerator;
- taking bites off someone else's plate
- watching television, reading a book, looking at our smart phone;
- in the car;
- eating off everyone's plate when cleaning up.

"If you love something, you pay attention to it."

It's not that you are not judging yourself for eating at these times or that your body doesn't get full. It's not really that you eat but don't eat; rather, it's that you eat, but because your attention is focused elsewhere, the food doesn't satisfy you. Or you feel guilty. Or you overeat. And then you eat some more.

When you're eating and your mind is on something else, you finish but it doesn't seem as if you really ate. But the you that reaches, buys, moves, and puts food in your mouth did eat.

Here are some guidelines to focus your attention on eating:

Eat when you are sitting down. The foods we eat standing up are usually the ones that we don't or won't eat sitting down: cake, chips, finger food, goodies. Standing up means the freedom to rush through it, forget that we ate it.

Sitting down means deciding to eat. When you give yourself permission to eat, you can slow down, taste the food, and decide how much more you want.

We'll explore eating one bite at a time, tasting our food, during the November 2023 Online Retreat.

Turn off the TV, put down the book, shut off your smart phone. You can easily overeat as you scroll through Facebook or Instagram because you are not fully tasting the food or focused on the subtle sensations of satisfaction.

Car-eating deserves individual mention as a way to eat without really eating, because there are so many other things to concentrate on: steering, breaking, not bumping into the car in front. As long as you aren't sitting at a table, eating from a plate, it didn't count.

If you are adamant about not giving up reading or watching TV or scanning Twitter while you eat, while driving, or at the refrigerator door, notice that. Notice the energy behind that feeling. Make room for that vehemence; don't push it away. Instead, during a meal when you are distracting yourself, gently become aware of how much you taste the food, how tuned in you are to your body, and what is enjoyable about the meal.

Eat in full view. The assumption is that people who are overweight should eat as little as possible. The assumption is that you should be spending your time losing weight, not eating. But if people who are overweight shouldn't eat -- and we need to eat to live -- we must forever pretend that we are not eating when we are eating.

You are allowed to eat the way you are allowed to breathe and walk and laugh and talk and go to sleep. When you lie, sneak, pretend to others, you lie, sneak, pretend to yourself. Denying your right to eat is, on some level, denying the importance and value of your life.

ACTION STEP: Be your own guest.

Choose one day a week to eat by yourself. Make it a special meal with foods you would serve to someone you love.

Before you take a bite, notice the aroma of the food, notice its color.

Take one bite and eat it slowly. How does the taste change as you chew? How does the food feel in your mouth?

Eat bite-by-bite, noticing the combination of taste, color and texture.

When you finish, write about your experience and what you noticed when you paid attention to your food. How did it taste? Was it different than when you are rushing or distracted? Did you and your body love the food on your plate?

Join us for our November 2023 Retreat to practice eating without distractions.

Challenge #4

Stop When You've Had Enough

The first step in breaking free is letting yourself eat when you are hungry. The next step is learning what you are hungry for, and eating it. After that, you learn when enough is enough. While hunger can be insistent and loud and unmistakable, enough can be subtle and quiet and easy to miss.

Be very sure you are hungry before you begin eating. If you eat when you aren't hungry, chances are that you will consistently overeat. Your body is receiving something it didn't ask for and doesn't need at that time. Like trying to nap when you're not tired, it doesn't fit.

Satisfaction is relative. What satisfies you one day may not be enough the next day. The mind and body are so closely intertwined that how you feel emotionally – the ups and downs of a day – affects how you feel physically. How you feel emotionally will determine what and how much you eat, and what and how much you eat will in turn determine how you feel.

Satisfaction is different from fullness. Satisfaction is: "I can stop eating now. I may have room for more, but I'm comfortable now." Fullness is: "I can't eat another bite."

Your attention must be present. If you are distracting yourself in some way from the taste of the food and from how it feels in your body, you will completely miss the signal of satisfaction.

I'll talk more about these satisfaction signals during our upcoming online retreat.

Pay close attention to what "enough" feels like to you over a period of time. The difference between hunger and enoughness can be a bite or two. If you are quiet enough and not directing your attention elsewhere, you can hear the bodily transition to satisfaction.

If you are not distracted, you can hear your body saying, "I've had enough. You can keep eating if you want, but I'm ready to stop." That voice is quiet and easy to miss, especially when you aren't used to hearing it or when the food tastes so good you don't want to hear it.

Stopping when you are satisfied may mean not finishing the food on your plate. It means resigning from the clean-plate club. It means being willing to put food away, give it away, or throw it away. The truth is you can throw it out or throw it in; either way it turns to waste.

"The difference between hunger and enoughness can be a bite or two."

When you are not hungry and you keep eating, the taste of food becomes secondary. You are trying to feed the feeling of deprivation and scarcity, the fear of not getting enough. But you can't feed a feeling with food. The fear of never getting enough does not go away when you eat everything on your plate because you might not get it again.

When you're in the middle of meal and you don't want to stop ... stop. The hand-to-mouth movement is mesmerizing – it's as if the world stops while you're eating. Pause, be conscious that you are unconscious. Break the spell by becoming aware of your body and other objects in the room. Put your fork or spoon down and ask yourself how you feel. If you're hungry, continue eating. If you're satisfied, stop eating for five minutes. Tell yourself you can continue if you want to.

Every time you choose to stop eating when you could continue you are acting from a desire to care for yourself, you are acting without compulsion. You are breaking free.

ACTION STEP: Find out when enough is enough

Practice listening for the small quiet voice that says, "I've had enough."

Eat half the food on your plate and then check to see where you are on the hunger scale. If you are at number 5 (comfortable) or above, stop eating.

Break the hand-to-mouth momentum by putting your silverware down between bites. Give yourself the opportunity to check in with your body. To pay attention to the bite in your mouth, not the one to come.

Leave a few bites on your plate at each meal. Make a commitment to be comfortable, to feel powerful and in charge of your eating.

Ask yourself how you want to feel when you get done eating. Allow yourself that tenderness.

We'll practice eating bite-by-bite at our upcoming online retreat. Join us!

Challenge #5

What To Do In The Middle Of A Binge

When you find yourself knee-deep in food and frantic, you're on a binge.

Bingeing is not only the act of eating and its concomitant feeling but all the moments, decisions, and feelings that lead up to that act. **Bingeing is a symptom.** And once it happens it becomes a problem in itself.

A binge is marked by urgency, by a feeling of "I want it and I want it now." A binge is a dry drunk. A binge is a plunge into oblivion.

We all need plunges into oblivion. Sometimes living feels like it is too much to handle. Sometimes we need to tune out and do nothing, absolutely nothing, for an hour. And we can excuse ourselves for doing nothing when we eat because eating is doing something. Eating is a socially acceptable way of taking time for ourselves.

"Eating is a socially acceptable way of taking time for ourselves."

Let's look at three negative, culturally pervasive beliefs about bingeing:

1. You binge because you lack willpower and discipline.
Which leads to feeling bad about yourself. What's wrong with me?
Where's my willpower?
2. Taking time for yourself is indulgent and selfish.
So you busy yourself with more and more doing, going, being available to everyone.
I'm fat; I'm selfish; I don't deserve ... (you name it).
3. To stop bingeing you must clamp down on yourself.
Frantic about bingeing, you decide it's time to go on a diet.

But bingeing is a sign that you need to give yourself more and not less. More attention, more time for yourself, more pleasure.

Deserving time for yourself is not a function of how smart or pretty or thin you are, or how much you did or didn't do today. You deserve time for yourself because you are alive.

Diets don't work because they assume we lack willpower (untrue!). They assume we can't trust ourselves to listen to our hunger. If we are to survive, we must control our reckless, bottomless hungers. Also untrue.

Diets don't work because they lead to bingeing. For every diet, there is an equal and opposite binge. And that is true.

Step one in preventing a binge is to find what, for you, are other ways to go unconscious, to get away from the concerns of day-to-day life, that is not food or drink. List the things you love to do. Meaningless, frivolous, irresponsible things. And let yourself do them.

*"For every diet
there is an equal
and opposite binge."*

We usually binge on the foods we won't allow ourselves to eat. The forbidden foods. But it is only when we give ourselves permission to eat them that we can choose not to eat them. If you can eat whatever you want whenever you are hungry, then there is no need to eat it all now.

But ... when you've tried it all and you still find yourself knee-deep in food, frantic and wanting to stop:

Sit down and don't pretend. This signals your brain that "this is for real. We're actually eating now." Until you notice and accept that you are bingeing, you have no chance of doing anything except what you are doing. Once you recognize and admit you are bingeing, you might decide to stop.

Give yourself permission to binge. Once you give yourself the okay, you can start tasting the food. You can relax and decide whether you like the taste of it, and, if not, whether you want to continue eating it.

Get up from the table, sofa, bed. Put down your fork or spoon. Break the hand-to-mouth movement. Remind yourself that you're still here, present, alive. You are more than your mouth and the need to eat.

If you are alone, talk out loud. Talk directly to the food. Tell it what you want it to do: numb you, comfort you, put you to sleep. There's nothing to do but to watch the feelings that come up and stop when it's time to stop.

If someone walks in during a binge, don't hide it. If they ask what you're doing, tell them you're eating, or if you're comfortable, tell them you're bingeing. Remember, you are not doing anything wrong.

After a binge ...

Be kind to yourself. This is when you need yourself the most. Do something wonderful – take a bath, go for a walk, call a friend – to counteract the deluge of condemnation.

Forgive yourself. You're human. You've done nothing wrong.

Learn from the binge. Take some time, either writing or thinking. What precipitated it? What feelings were stirred up? If you had a chance to do it differently, what would you change next time around? A binge is never wasted time if you learn from it.

Do not deprive yourself of food the next day. This is punishment. Just as you need to be emotionally kinder to yourself, you also need to be physically kinder. When you get hungry again, ask yourself, your body what you want most to eat and give it to yourself. You need to be reminded that you can eat what you want and take care of yourself at the same time, that eating does not destroy you.

ACTION STEP: Bring your forbidden foods home

We forbid and forbid and forbid ourselves to have food that we like, that bring us pleasure. It's no surprise that when we feel a crack in our steely resolve to restrict ourselves – and decide to binge – we immediately run for those foods. Sometimes we binge not because we want chocolate but because we're not allowed to have it.

1. Make a list of the foods you don't allow yourself to eat and decide which one you would like to eat again without guilt.
2. Bring the food home and allow yourself to eat it until you are satisfied. Allow yourself the pleasure of good tastes.
3. As you eat it, notice how it tastes, how it feels in your mouth. Do you like it as much as you thought you would?
4. Remind yourself that you can have it again any time you are hungry for that food.
5. Repeat! Add one forbidden food each week until you have no forbidden foods.

We'll practice eating bite-by-bite at our upcoming online retreat. Join us!

Next Steps

The Process is the Goal

I am not special or unusual or lucky; the only difference between me and you is the time I spent on developing a new relationship with food. You can do this, too.

Focus on a positive vision of yourself and decide on specific food-related actions you can take (ones that don't involve punishment, shame, or guilt) to change your relationship with food. For example, decide to eat only when you're hungry, putting away the book and turning off the television so you can focus on enjoying your food.

Be consistent -- and don't give up. No matter how many times you've tried and failed, no matter how desperate you feel in the moment or in the middle of the night, you can change. It isn't magic; it isn't luck; it's time spent.

And put what you've learned in this book into practice. Join me for my upcoming retreat!

Women Food And God **Online Retreat with Geneen Roth**

Novemer 9-12, 2023 • LIVE via Zoom

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The retreat will take the teachings in this book to the next level. You'll be in the company of others like yourself, with the same longings, and experience first-hand eating what your body wants, without distractions, until you're satisfied. And so much more.

Mark your calendar now. You don't want to miss this opportunity. It's only happens twice a year. I look forward to seeing you there.

*"What a transformational online retreat!
I have learned how little food
I need to feel satisfied ...
and that was a big WOW!"*

Denise Grant

About Geneen



Geneen Roth is the author of ten books, including her most recent, *This Messy Magnificent Life*, and *New York Times* bestsellers *When Food Is Love, Lost and Found*, and *Women Food and God*, as well as *The Craggy Hole in My Heart and the Cat Who Fixed It*. Over the past forty years, she has worked with thousands of people in her groundbreaking retreats and workshops and has appeared on numerous national shows, including *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *20/20*, *the Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, and *The View*. She lives in California with charms of hummingbirds, her husband Matt, and Izzy the fabulous, eating-disordered dog.

Geneen Roth's pioneering books were among the first to link compulsive eating and perpetual dieting with deeply personal and spiritual issues that go far beyond food, weight and body image. Rather than pushing away the "crazy" things we do, Geneen's work proceeds with the conviction that our actions and beliefs make exquisite sense, and that the way to transform our relationship with food, our body, and so much more in our life is to be open, curious and kind with ourselves – instead of punishing, impatient and harsh.

To find out more about upcoming events with Geneen, as well as articles by and interviews with Geneen, go to: <https://geneenroth.com/>

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