Full Spectrum Eating

Unlock Your Potential for a Healthier Relationship With Food

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction - page 1
2. Learn the Spectrum - page 5
3. The Five Points - page 15
4. Additional Guidance - page 24
5. Conclusion - page 26

Introduction

Full Spectrum Eating (FSE) is a healing tool designed to help you develop a healthier relationship with food at a time when there is unprecedented access to a great variety of foods and ideas about eating.

As a psychologist, I've worked for over 30 years helping people with food and eating problems of all kinds. I could see the pain many people felt using external structures like diets or food plans. I could also see the pain many patients felt trying to tune into their own needs and wants, and their feelings of shame or failure when they couldn't do it or it backfired. I wanted my patients to be less obsessed with which kind of eating style or diet they used and more focused on allowing themselves to get the benefits of whichever style seemed best for them. Over the years, I've developed these concepts, which is a healing tool I now call Full Spectrum Eating.
Full Spectrum Eating: your personal guide

Full Spectrum Eating is like having a guide—one that doesn't tell you what to eat, but helps you find peace and contentment in the crazy world of food today. It is an organizing concept that allows you to deal with your food with more equanimity. This will give you more time and emotional space to spend on other aspects of your life, such as your family, your career, personal creative projects, or the continued building of self-esteem and self-acceptance.

Like any other method or tool, it does not promise complete relief from suffering around food. However, it can provide a means of feeling better about your food and eating. Where food is less of an issue, self-care can flourish. Our choices, instead of being overwhelming, or even frightening, can become manageable and even enjoyable.

So many food philosophies, so much confusion

I know we all want food and eating to be simple, and at some points and places in history, it presumably was. Food was eaten more communally and prepared more by a community, too. Production and access to food were also more limiting. Now we have so many choices our heads spin. Moreover, we are told to diet. We are told to forget dieting. We're told to eat carbs one day and the next to avoid them completely. Same with protein, sugar, and on down the line.

If you have a moment, check in with yourself as you answer these questions. Do you agree with the following?

-As I think about it, strict food plans never work for me. Yes/No
- I would like to be able to tune into my needs and eat whatever I want. Yes/No
- I'd like to be able to stick to a simple, healthy form of eating. Yes/No
- I think food plans can be helpful to me. Yes/No
- My life is too busy to focus on super healthy eating, and it's frustrating. Yes/No
- I want to challenge myself by eating new and different foods, but I'm afraid I will lose control. Yes/No

This quiz has no right answers. Its use is simply to encourage you to become aware of how you use and you would like to use food. What did you learn about yourself from these few questions?

There are hundreds of kinds of foods and many kinds of diets, promising all sorts of benefits from weight loss to extended life spans. For a moment, each idea might seem right. But how could everybody be right? It's not possible. How do you use this information to benefit yourself?
Marketing complicates our decision-making

Adding to this confusion is the way ideas and theories about food and eating are marketed. In order to be successful in the marketplace, many new ideas are often touted as revolutionary and capable of fixing everything. Yet common sense contradicts this marketing ploy.

In my opinion, good ideas stand on the shoulders of previous good ideas. Everything is built on a network of connection and knowledge, but this isn't the way marketing and publishing industries work. Consumers who are trying to make an informed decision are often duped by aggrandized information. This is also unfair to patients who are trying to find balance in their lives and are trying to heal from eating and weight disorders.

So, when you're reading this guide on FSE, understand that I'm hoping to break this pattern and present this as yet another idea in the long chain of ideas that came before and will come after this. It is simply another tool to add to your tool chest and one which, I hope, helps you a great deal. But even if it helps you just a little, that could make a meaningful difference in your relationship with food.

FSE does not tell you to eat high protein, low protein, more tofu, more or less meat, more or less vegetables, or more salad. It simply allows you to arrange your eating in a way that supports your psychological health and your nutritional goals. The system is designed to protect you against getting too rigid about your food. If you feel you are boxing yourself in by only eating certain foods, then use FSE to move into a less structured form of eating. If you feel your eating is too free-form, FSE can also move you towards more definition and support from the outside world.

Feels Like Quicksand

Here's a dilemma that many of us can relate to: We start to diet, which is often very structured, then we decide we are too hemmed in and want to eat more naturally. We begin to eat just what we feel like eating. It feels good to do that! Then it feels bad. We expect our weight to self-regulate. For some of us this does happen and we are able to go off the diet/no diet merry-go-round. But for many of us that isn't the case, and it begins to feel like quicksand.

One solution is to figure out what amount of structure, or lack thereof, works best for you. Are you an internal eater, taking your cues from within yourself and finding your structure within ("inside awareness" in Full Spectrum Eating terms)? Or, are you an external eater, taking your cues from the environment, finding your structure in the outside world ("outside awareness" in Full Spectrum Eating terms)? Or are you somewhere in the middle?
An example of an internal cue is a growling stomach, a sense that the body needs food, which might arise from very slight feelings of fatigue, sluggishness, or increasing grouchiness. An external cue might be the clock striking 12 or 1 PM to signal lunch, the smell of food, or your family calling you for dinner.

It’s a journey to find what kind of awareness/structure works best for you and your healthy eating given your lifestyle and point in recovery from an eating disorder. Full Spectrum Eating can help you find your way.
Learn the Spectrum

Learning the Spectrum is Intuitive

The spectrum is an easy-to-understand system, which helps you sort it all out. You can learn the system quickly and then spend time fine-tuning how it works for you. It helps you make sense of all the diets and no-diets.

I think you will get a feeling for how to use and relate to the Spectrum in an instinctive way. FSE is divided into five different points of eating. Learning the Spectrum is the first step in using the system. Most people find that applying it to themselves takes some work. To help you with this I'll be providing examples of how people use the Spectrum.

Through these examples, you can learn how to eat well, no matter what life brings. These examples are composites of people I have known, people I have worked with, and people I have imagined. They do not represent any one real person, but rather are themselves fictional. In fact, all characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Here's an overall description of the Spectrum.

First, imagine a scale from one to five. It can look like this:

1 ___________ 2 ___________ 3 ___________ 4 ___________ 5

On the far left is Point One eating, which is complete "outside awareness" (OA). This means your eating is informed, not by you, but by influences outside of yourself which you have chosen to listen to.

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In order to get a sense of Point One eating, please take a moment for a guided imagery exercise. Sit back and use your imagination. Envision that you are in a simple yet beautiful and elegant spiritual center retreat, or perhaps a retreat for a church or other religious event. Perhaps you are at a nature retreat, studying birds, flowers, or rock formations. Or, perhaps you find yourself at a
creative writing or poetry retreat. The point is the outside influence. You eat what and when they tell you to eat.

Imagine that the retreat center is very comfortable, with a swimming pool and lovely gardens. You have come there to meditate, relax, and center yourself. There is no TV or internet. You have had a dip in the pool and you are feeling very good. Even better, not only do you not have to cook dinner, but also you don't have to think about what you will have. You are looking forward to hearing interesting talks from some of the retreat leaders, be they priests, rabbis, imams, Buddhist teachers, or secular instructors.

After the talks you may pray, meditate, or write in your journal. Your sleep is sound and deep.

This retreat center has very limited choices, which are both delicious and satisfying. In fact, everyone gets the same thing for dinner. You find yourself relieved to be able to go back to your room and rest and then reemerge for a fascinating lecture on emotional and spiritual development. Because the food is so controlled and contained you have had the opportunity to nurture yourself on other levels without distraction. You begin to feel centered and at peace.

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Here is another imagery exercise to give you an alternative perspective on Point One eating.

Perhaps you and a group of friends are camping in the wilderness. You've packed your food and it's of course very structured. You're enjoying nature and getting amazing photos that you can't wait to share when you return. You're breathing in the clean air and scent of pine trees and the mountains. You've preplanned a variety of easy-to-prepare meals. Because all your meals and their preparation have already been decided upon, you barely have to think about it at all. Food is so simple that you're able to truly taste, savor, and appreciate it without worry.

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Point One eating refers to a very simple and straight-forward meal plan, which could fit easily on one page. Your outside awareness is helping you regulate your food as you use Point One eating.

On the far right is Point Five eating, which is completely based on "inside awareness" (IA). Here, you go inward and work with yourself to understand your deepest wants and needs in relation to food, and to meet those in an organic way. You don't take influence from the outside—it's all about your inner knowledge or intuition of what you want. You spend time tuning into your inner awareness so that you can pick up on the subtle signals of moods, feelings, needs, and
wishes and interpret them in terms of the sustenance your body, mind, and emotions require. You might also be tuning into your deeper awareness regarding other aspects of life as well.

It may be rare for most of us to actually find ourselves in a situation where we have unlimited food choices day and night. Perhaps if you were on a cruise or at a major resort, you might experience it. On a day-to-day level, meanwhile, you might experience elements of Point Five eating at a big buffet lunch or dinner, or a family picnic with lots of food choices.

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To understand Point Five eating more fully, please let your mind indulge in a fantasy.

Allow yourself to imagine you are at a resort. Every meal is a banquet and smorgasbord. In addition, there’s food available at all times of day and night. You can eat all you want or have none of it, depending on how you feel.

You have the psychological tools to use this abundance wisely. Maybe you were born able to tune into what your really body needs or maybe you learned how through hard work. This hard work may have been in the form of self-help reading, workshops, psychotherapy, yoga, or spiritual and other life experience that taught you how to understand and respond to your own needs in a healthy way.

You rise and have a cup of tea. You notice you're not at all hungry. You go out and take a wonderful morning walk, but you bring with you a delicious healthy muffin with peanut butter because you know you tend to get hungry within an hour of rising.

When you get back you feel like reading a book which you have found fascinating. It feels good to nibble here and there on cake and ice cream during the afternoon. A few hours later, you feel hunger and know that you want a meal, an early dinner. You choose fish and vegetables. They taste great. You crave fruit, and for dessert, while watching a thrilling movie at the resort, you munch on berries and yogurt, topped off by marshmallow s'mores. You sleep soundly.

The next day you have a wonderful breakfast of ham, eggs, and pancakes. You're pretty full but you woke up particularly hungry and you know your morning activities will require a lot of energy. You are happy to have had such a wonderful meal. You barely eat much until about three in the afternoon when you have a cheeseburger for dinner, and of course with fries. So good! You don't feel the need to finish all of the cheeseburger, stopping naturally when you reach a point of satiation. You are satisfied all the way until you turn in for sleep in the evening.

The day after that, you're drawn to fruits and vegetables and you eat yogurt, cheese, and fruits for most of the day between activities of your choosing, nibbling when you feel like it.

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Full Spectrum Eating
You're able to ask yourself, "What is it that I want?" Do I want food? Do I want rest? Do I want exercise? Do I want company? Do I want intellectual stimulation? It feels great to tune in and know yourself so well.

You feel well, nourished, and happy. You're having fun with food, naturally keeping a good, healthy weight, and your body feels stable and energized.

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In between the extremes of complete outside awareness and complete inside awareness, there are also middle points on the spectrum. Right in the center is Midpoint Eating, **Point Three**, which is a balance between these two poles and is a combination of inside and outside awareness. **Point Two** eating involves mostly outside cues, but with some flexibility for choice. **Point Four** eating involves mostly choice, but with a little more outside awareness.

It's not possible to live in this world and remain totally on one side of the spectrum or the other at all times. However, for purposes of learning the spectrum as a healing tool, we envision these extremes. They can help us orient towards what would be the best eating styles for us, given our psychological development, lifestyle, and goals.

In order for you to fully use the spectrum, I'd like to go over some ideas which might be of help. They have to do with topics such as judgments, realities, control, and structure. Then I will talk about the spectrum in more detail and use more examples.

**We All Have Judgments**

We all have our biases and judgments. We couldn't get along without them. They help us categorize a complex world and make rapid decisions. From crossing the street, to evaluating whether to let someone into our homes, judgments form a bulwark of our boundaries and self-care. If we have too few judgments, we can be very poor decision-makers, allowing others to take advantage of us and causing us trouble in understanding how the world works. If we have too many judgments, we lock ourselves into a very narrow understanding of our world and we lose our creative edge.

Many of us, including me, have characterized certain kinds of eating as good or bad. Although it's hard to admit it now, at one point in my career, when I was a very young psychologist and thought I knew quite a lot, I was almost 100% against food plans of any kind. I thought they blocked a person's ability to tune into their deepest needs around food and life. I was very against them. It took me awhile to understand how useful and even life-saving they could be for many people.
I was directing and working as a psychologist in a weight management program at my local medical center. I had written a book on women and food, and thought I knew a lot. However, through working with my patients I learned that my viewpoint was quite narrow. Not everybody wanted to, or could, tune into their deepest needs. Outside structure in the form of a food plan individually tailored to that person gave many strength, inner stability, and the capacity to lose weight. The patients in this program all had serious medical conditions which would have benefited from weight loss. Helping them to learn to tune into their bodies might have taken years, and they did not have years to regain their health. I was humbled by my experience.

Looking back on it, it seems that my views at that time were quite extreme. I had read about the dangers of dieting and agreed so wholeheartedly with them that I couldn't see any benefit in following an outside structure. Outside awareness was the enemy, and inner awareness, the only friend. The job was then to devote a great deal of time to cultivating inner awareness.

There was nothing wrong with that view, except that it left out a large part of our human experience with food. For instance, in how many societies around the world, in primitive or modern times, do people have time to tune in on a regular basis to the great variety of their needs, wants, feelings, and ideas? Perhaps people with a great deal of leisure time have the ability to do this, but even for those people, as I've learned over the years, too much tuning in can be as bad as too little.

For example, a new mom could get quite frustrated if she were balancing caring for a newborn and trying to tune into her deepest needs. This equation most often would not work. Her tuning in is focused on the baby, with little energy left for self. It's not the right way to approach food at that developmental turning point. At that point, the new mother might need others to help her eat regularly and healthfully.

For some people with a great deal of leisure time, the concern can be self-absorption. Too much inner tuning in can create another kind of narrowness which leaves little room for interests outside the self.

As health practitioners often say, it's about balance. We use Full Spectrum Eating to find the extremes and then find ways to use the whole spectrum to help ourselves find balance. As you probably know from your own experience, finding your own balance feels good, and is healing.

It was only after I began to work in a weight management program, and then in private practice helping people with a variety of food and eating concerns, that I could see the benefits of outer structure.
In my private practice, and in the program, I saw people trying to tune in and failing miserably. It made me so sad to witness their sense of failure. I saw people whose weight was causing a variety of medical problems for them. I saw people trying rigid diets and benefiting, then trying rigid diets and regressing. I saw so much about the huge range of ways people can relate to food that I began to realize there is no one healthy way to eat. I was immersing myself in helping people with food and eating issues and I was feeling so many things--so sad about how hard it was for them; so frustrated with myself that I could not help them more; so happy and joyful when they found ways to care for themselves better, whether with food, friends, family, or something else. Having had some compulsive eating issues in my college years, I could relate.

While you're learning FSE, it's important to suspend judgment long enough to understand the benefits of each point on the system. That's the way to get the most out of the healing tools. Over-judging stops us from using the full spectrum of ways to eat. Though we can never fully erase our judgments, at least we can be aware of them and temporarily suspend them in order to open our minds to new possibilities with food, eating, and life.

**Facing Our Many Realities**

Most of us would like to have unlimited life choices and have the ability to make wise choices almost all of the time. I would certainly like that opportunity with life and with food.

However, for all of us, even under the best of circumstances, our choices in life are somewhat limited. In relationship to food, we each have our own unique limitations to deal with. Some of us are working full time or more, or are in school and maybe working as well. Some of us are parenting an infant or child, or caring for an elderly relative. Others have certain foods that disagree with or trigger us. Some of us have very strong ideas about what constitutes our own healthy eating. Many of us have limited food budgets and limited access to some of our favorite, healthful foods. Full Spectrum Eating helps us deal with the reality that unlimited choices with food or with life aren't always possible or even desirable. However, accepting the reality that life often hands us limitations is essential to our well-being and personal growth.

**Too Much Control!**

At some point in our lives, most of us have experienced “over-planning.” We might have wondered, "Am I a control freak?" or even been called that by others. That's happened to me! It can feel like an honor and a curse. Some of us are good at organizing, but sometimes get overly controlling of others or ourselves. Some of us are not good at organizing and spend a whole lot of time feeling frustrated and out of control. There are some things we can't control; in fact, there are many things we can't control. Sometimes control is our best friend and sometimes it is our worst enemy.
We might over-plan our daily schedule, our future, or our food. To me, over-structure means more structure than is good for me at that moment. Some of us do well with very controlled lives. We want to know where we have to be at every hour of the day. We structure our entertainment and friendship connections well in advance. Others of us are more spontaneous, enjoying a life without so much external form. There is no right or wrong here. Whatever works well for an individual at that phase of his or her life is best for that person.

Many of us have had very unpleasant, even miserable, experiences with control in life. Take a moment to think about the way too much control has hurt you and made your life more difficult. Now, go to the other end and think about the ways structure has helped you--ways that you have really enjoyed having a schedule or being accountable for doing things in a certain way. For instance, you might have been determined about practicing the piano and through this mastered many songs which you now get a great deal of pleasure playing. You might have mastered a sport through intense, disciplined practice.

Now consider control with food. How has too much or too little control harmed or helped you?

Healthy Structure Provides Support

Structure can hurt you but can also be helpful. We set bedtimes for children and set up play dates with their friends. If we set too much structure for children, it can be destructive: they can feel pressured as if they have too little room to breathe and may become anxious and worried. But if we set too little structure, children can feel bereft and unsupported, as well as confused and anxious. A balance must be struck which works for that particular child and her parents. It is the same for us, as adults, when we work with our food and eating.

Maybe you have experienced a healthy use of outer control with food and structured eating (Point One eating at its best) when you were on vacation and had three meals a day served to
you. You might have experienced healthy structure when you were a child, if your parents lovingly planned and served your food, or when you were ill and a friend brought you meals.

Laney, at 42, was busy with her two kids, part-time IT work, and blogging. However, she tended to overeat as she blogged, when she picked up the kids, and later on in the evening when she was exhausted. She would begin by intentionally overeating fruits and vegetables to try to control her cravings, but by the end of the day, she was compulsively eating pretzels and chocolate. She really appreciated the weekends when her busy husband, who loved to cook, would prepare great meals for everyone. Her food got back in line and she felt more relaxed.

**Breaking Out of Jail: When Excessive Structure Becomes Oppressive**

But too much structure can turn into a very rigid diet. There are reasons this might work short-term for some of us. Others would find it quite toxic. Some of us are very familiar with what I call "diet jail." This is a really unpleasant place and one from which we want to escape. The over-structuring of food and eating feels oppressive. We feel like prisoners and just want to get out. Sometimes we binge or stress-eat to get out of that jail. Has structure itself failed us or did we just choose the wrong structure for that part of our lives?

Sophia was working part-time and going to college. She was sure that the "Doctor's Diligent" diet, which she had read about, would do the trick. She felt great on days one and two. However, by day four she became aware that the diet had so many restrictions and she felt so awful on it, that she became really distressed. She felt like she would be a failure if she went off, but knew she was losing her capacity to eat according to this diet, which became, for her, overly restrictive. As her discomfort and panic grew, she did what she had done before and began to binge. The binging, though not healthy, did release her from the restrictive diet. She didn't know what to do next, but was relieved to be off "Doctor's Diligent."

Another problem occurs when we want to bring in a little bit of structure to our lives but can’t because any amount reminds us of structure nightmares from the past. We become paralyzed and can't act on our own behalf to help ourselves because we feel jailed with even the least amount of external control, even if we have chosen it. We are truly stuck and can't use even the most benign structure to help ourselves. This happened to Jennifer when she contemplated doing a new vegetarian food plan for a week with her friends. It wasn't even very restrictive, but she'd had 30 years of dieting and just couldn't bring herself to try anything that felt similar. The negative associations with dieting were too strong.

At times we might overeat just to rebel. No one can tell us what to do! Sadly this includes even our own higher, wiser selves. We wind up defeating ourselves in this manner. We end up sad, angry, and confused. It shouldn't be this way. Food should be simple.
How can you make peace with the part of you that wants structure and the other part that is rebellious and feels that you have won some special personal freedom by deleting food structure from your life? We know that to succeed with weight management, one must reconcile these dilemmas and move beyond them. We know that one must talk to one’s rebellious, adventurous, inner child and let him or her know that all structure is not the enemy; structure is just another tool.

Learning to Manage Your Healing Tools

On the level of food and eating, Full Spectrum Eating can help you manage these rebellious, adventurous parts of yourself. This can help you build up your self-esteem. However, it works best when you are also building self-esteem in other ways. One can do this through spiritual development, psychological development, and/or using other learning tools, such as books, audio or video lessons, or yoga classes. Meditation, prayer, and time in nature can also build a sense of calmness and self-esteem. I imagine many of you are working on, and have made progress with, building self-esteem, self-acceptance, and loving self-management in such ways.

Let me put this in context. FSE is just one healing tool. Max, at fifty-eight years of age, was having some trouble using FSE for his weight management. I suggested to him that he take a break from FSE in order to first work on strengthening his self-esteem and boundaries through weekly meditation classes and regular psychotherapy. A few months later he got back to working with FSE and this time found it much more useful.

Imagine that you have a tool chest filled with healing tools. It's fine to work with just one tool at a time. Can you imagine a handy man or woman taking out her tool chest and working with every single tool at once? It would be overwhelming and nothing would really get fixed. It's actually the same with this kind of work. It's great to pick up and focus on working with just one tool or two at a time. It's great to pick up one tool and play and familiarize yourself with it. It's
great to even think about picking up a tool because at least that’s a first step. I want you to be
challenged working with interesting new ideas, but I don’t want you to be overwhelmed or work
with more than you can handle.
The Five Points

Point One Eating: Simple Can Be Good

Sometimes you just need a little outside awareness to guide you along. Other times, you need a lot of outside help. At those times when you need a lot of outside help, it's good to dip into Point One eating. It imposes direction on you externally. This can be in the form of a food plan. The physical environment can aid in a process of forming a simple connection with food. This can take the form of situations as diverse as a spiritual retreat or spa with structured meal times, or a hospital-based or commercial weight loss program, which offer minimal choices and manages your food so you don't have to.

On this end, you don't control any decision-making about your food. You just sit and eat what is given to you, or you prepare food along very rigid structured lines and eat this way for a day or two. You don't question—you just go with the outside structure, even if you are doing this at home. Here there is no choice. That sounds pretty bad to some people, and great to others. Let's non-judgmentally consider the costs and benefits.

Not having to think so much about what you eat can be calming and anxiety-reducing. When meals are planned beforehand, like they are in inpatient eating disorder and weight management programs, or if you're following certain diet regimens, then you have more time to think about other areas of your life that you may perhaps have been neglecting before. At retreats, spas, or other communal eating situations, where the same dishes are served to everyone, the same stress-alleviating benefits apply. Here you can focus on your truest intentions such as your meditation practice, deep relaxation, exercise classes, journaling, communicating with loved ones, or whichever things mean the most to you.

When you are doing Point One eating, life is simple. It's calming, it's relaxing, but it can also be rigid and annoying. However, most of the time, Point One eating is only temporary. Not only is
it hard to stick to such a structured diet for a long time, but the situations where you eat like this are not long-term either. Say you attend a very structured, week-long spiritual retreat. The benefits of Point One eating are great--you prayed, meditated, and really got in touch with yourself. However, once you return from the retreat, this simple eating can be hard to stick to. Eventually, you must come back to the real world with its plethora of food choices and choice of meal times. What then? That's when you need the entire FSE approach.

Sometimes we go to extremes and announce to friends and family that we are going to embark on a very rigid diet and we’re going to do this for a long time or possibly "forever". Sadly, this tends to not work out for many of us, putting us in a bind. Certainly, there are people for whom this does work. They announced their very good intentions to family and friends and stuck to their plan. However, for the majority of people I have worked with over many years, this has not worked out well.

Point One eating can be a double-edged sword. Though it can teach you patience and discipline, it can also be destructive and misused. In a retreat setting, a week of Point One eating might be fine; at home a day or two is often plenty. Too much discipline can lead to restriction, which can spiral out of control and make it harder to develop a positive relationship with food. Or perhaps the situation develops differently. Instead of learning how to be content and less focused on food, you become the opposite. Suddenly, part of you wants to eat and can't stop thinking about your next meal. What should you do then? Using the spectrum, we can help balance ourselves as we go from one situation to another.

When leaving the retreat, there's nothing wrong with sticking to Point One eating for a day or so. In fact, an argument could be made that a rapid transition away from Point One could be difficult and cause overeating or even binging. If you choose to move away from Point One eating, then make a transition plan. For instance, you could choose to do Point One eating for the first 24 hours after you leave the retreat, and then switch to Point Two over the next few days. As you learn more about Full Spectrum Eating, you will get a sense of which points are your full spectrum comfort range.

Sophia used her Point One eating for only part of her weekly routine. During the week she was pretty controlled because she had work and school to keep her day and eating organized. However, on the weekends, she really was more out of control and needed Saturday to be very structured. On Friday, she planned her meals and made them as simple as possible. She bought her food ahead of time. If she was going out with friends on Friday evening, she decided ahead of time if she would have alcohol, and if so, how much. She would eat a healthy meal before meeting her friends to reduce her chances of binge-eating later. She also tried not to stay out later than midnight because she would tend to overeat if she got home later. In fact, she packed an
energy bar in her purse and ate it on the way home from the event so that she could go home and bypass the kitchen.

Sunday was easier because she met her mother and extended family for church, and then she and her mother went out for brunch. They generally ate some place healthy and then took a walk in the park or at the beach. This seemed to calm her down for the rest of the afternoon, and food was not a problem. However, Sunday evening was another story. With the workweek looming ahead, she knew she needed to use structure and so she had a Point One dinner every Sunday. It wasn't fancy and it wasn't even always a great dinner, but it did the trick. In fact, it was most often a healthy frozen entrée with a small salad. She planned which frozen entrée in advance. She also made the salad ahead of time on Sunday morning so there would be no question about what she’d eat for dinner.

She also had a post-meal activity. She would pick it early in the day so that she knew what she would be doing after her dinner. It was often a movie or show on the Internet. There would be no food involved. If she was feeling particularly anxious and didn't think she could watch without eating, she would take a shower after dinner and crawl into bed with a good book. That was her Plan B. She didn't need it often, but it was helpful to know it was there.

**Point Two Eating**

Imagine you're on your way home after your amazing camping trip and your transition is going well. Your eating reflects the structure and simplicity of the wonderful experience. You feel so good about your food. You're enjoying nature and getting amazing photos that you can't wait to share when you return. You're breathing in the clean air and scent of pine trees and the mountains. Food is so easy that you barely think about it at all, and you're able to truly taste, savor, and appreciate it.

Alternatively, picture that you've been on a spiritual retreat. You deepened your meditative practice and developed some wonderful insights about yourself and your life. As you journal about your retreat, you realize that the delicious, garden-fresh vegetarian food made you feel good inside.

However, you're also missing your favorite chicken salad sandwich and the cheeseburger you've come to love from the cafe that makes it just right. You realize that in the past, forbidding
yourself all the special foods you love usually leads to breaking down and binging. You use this bit of inside awareness to adjust your program. Like at the retreat, you now eat fresh fruits, vegetables, and tofu for a lovely vegetarian dinner. For breakfast you keep it simple with a basic whole grain cereal and milk. But for lunch, you allow yourself to be a bit more free. That's where you have your chicken salad sandwich. Using that bit of inside awareness, you realize that the cheeseburger would be too big a step and that it will have to wait for the weekend when you can enjoy it with a friend. This thought calms you down and you enjoy your eating for that day.

Jennifer was pretty upset about her food and her life when she turned 52. She found herself overeating on a regular basis, but didn't feel she could stand another diet, which is what she had experienced in her late teens and 20s. She had been bulimic in college and really didn't want to go back to that. She decided to start at Point Two eating because she felt that Point One was too rigid. She did Point Two eating for three weeks and found that she enjoyed the structure while the moderate amount of flexibility didn't leave her feeling boxed in/trapped. After that, she moved into Point Three, or Midpoint Eating.

**Point Three or Midpoint Eating:**

You might not want as much outside influence, or feel that Point Two eating is just too rigid for you. At the same time, although you don’t want as much outside structure, you might also not feel you’re ready to let go of structure entirely. If that’s the case, then Midpoint Eating might be best for you.

Keep in mind that none of these are permanent ways to eat for your whole life, but you may move thoughtfully from point to point on occasion. You might use different points throughout your life.

Midpoint Eating provides a special place of balance, which is between high external awareness and high internal awareness.

Imagine, if you will, that you are at a wonderful spa. You can hike or you can sit and read, whatever is your pleasure. There are four choices for breakfast: cereal, eggs, fruit, and yogurt. All are delicious. There are always tea and fruit for snacks, but those are the only snacks available. For lunch, you have a choice of five delicious and different dishes. Dinner is a bit
more formal. You are brought to a wonderful dining room with incredible views and a very peaceful atmosphere. The dinner menu is fixed, so you have no choice. There's dessert at dinner, but this is the only meal which includes dessert. There are no seconds on dessert. There is a feeling of enough food, but not extra.

This beautiful spot is located far enough away from any store that what they serve is what you get. All the food is healthy, and there's a fair amount of choice, but it's still limited. For some people, the choices at this spa are too many and feel overwhelming. For others, there is too little choice, and they both desire and can handle more variety.

In a way, Midpoint Eating is the best of both worlds. You can feel confident that you're getting the kind of psychological structure around food that you find soothing, but you can also make sure that you’re slowly building up the variety of foods that you are comfortable with eating. For instance, you might work towards adding more healthy fats like avocado and olive oil to your diet.

Laney was really challenging herself to include more fats in her diet. Growing up, she had always thought that fats were "bad" and would make you "fat." This is a message she learned from her mother and aunt who were always on diets. Now she found herself in the suburbs of a major city, working part-time from home, blogging, and caring for two small children, while her husband worked more than full time. She wanted to make sure her children were being fed a healthy and balanced diet, and had been reading a lot about healthy fats and how good they were and had begun serving the kids more avocado, olive oil salad dressings, and nuts. Now she wanted to add these things to her own life as well.

The best way to do this, she thought, was to use Point Three eating for herself as well as the children, and decided to have a sandwich of any kind for lunch. Between those pieces of bread there could reside not only turkey and mustard, which was her usual, but also avocado and olive oil-based mayonnaise. On occasion she would allow herself the once-forbidden peanut butter sandwich. In addition, she began to use salad dressing with a tablespoon of olive oil in it instead of her no-oil dressings. These controlled and purposeful additions helped her feel more comfortable and calm when incorporating these nutritious foods.

Midpoint Eating is great if you're in a reasonably good mood, you're busy, but you want some choice. It's the way a lot of people eat and with good reason. However, if you've had a very stressful day, maybe you don't want that sandwich with anything in it. It's just too much choice. You don't want to have to think that much. You might wonder if you're in danger of over-eating or getting overwhelmed and skipping lunch. In this case, go back towards Point Two eating. The important thing is to listen to your body and get in touch with your stress levels so that you can more peacefully handle food and eating.
Point Four Eating:

Point Four eating focuses on inner choice, while providing a small amount of structure. It provides you with more flexibility concerning what you eat, as well as when and how much you eat. For instance, breakfast, lunch, and dinner can be varied each day. Mid-morning or mid-afternoon snacks can be consumed whenever your body tells you it needs it and can, in fact, be substitutes for lunch or dinner if you so wish.

Now you are tuning in deeply to your needs regarding food and perhaps your life in general. You're really working hard to get to know yourself and your food preferences. However, you're not ready to let go a hundred percent—you still want a little structure. It's an experiment and you’ve decided you are comfortable with trying it out and seeing where it goes.

The object of Point Four eating is to keep ourselves in a good range, where we are challenged appropriately, but are also enjoying our food in a relaxed way.

Sophia loved the idea of Point Four eating; it was always her goal to be able to eat what she wanted when she wanted, but also to have some organization to guide her. She wanted that little bit of direction to make sure she got enough fresh fruits and vegetables and ate regularly. However, it took over a year before she was really any good at it. That was time spent in therapy, yoga class, letting go of a relationship that wasn't working, and in general learning more about herself. It was her therapist who told her, "that time is going to go by anyway and it's much better to use it to grow and develop than to continue to go through the revolving door of guilt and shame about food."

After mastering Point Four, Sophia had little desire to try Point Five eating. She felt really good having achieved the ability to use Points Three and Four.
Point Five Eating:

With Point Five eating, there is no limit to the number of elements that are based on choice. For instance, meals or snacks can be eaten when and if they are desired and any kind of food you wish to eat is okay. At this point in the spectrum, you could choose to go a whole day without eating or perhaps eat five meals in one day—they’re all okay as long as you are truly tuning into what your body needs for that day.

Point Five eating is a state of mind. It takes a lot of inner strength and a lot of self-responsibility to do Point Five eating well. With all that choice, there's a lot of opportunity to go astray. And how astray we can go, eating whatever we want, whenever we want!

Point Five eating may either really help or really hinder you. At its worst, it’s hard on the budget, hard on the waistline, and can promote disease because not everything one craves is necessarily good for oneself. However, for some people, Point Five eating is just wonderful. They find that their cost for food decreases as their satisfaction increases. They feel free and unconstrained. For most of us, however, we wouldn't eat at Point Five on a regular basis. It takes too much tuning in to how we are feeling at that exact moment, which can be difficult to do with our busy schedules.

If we're also responsible for feeding children or others, it's simply impossible to tune in like this except for occasions when we’re on vacation or at a retreat with a variety of food available to us.

Michelle had just turned 33 and was living in the heart of the city. She loved city life, and being able to walk to work, museums, great restaurants, and public transportation. For a while, it was Michelle's dream to master Point Five eating. She had wanted to learn to eat that way her entire life. When she learned about Full Spectrum Eating, she realized that her best friend, Tanya, was using Point Five without even being aware of it. Michelle was very attracted to the values behind Point Five eating. As a physical therapist and personal trainer, tuning into her body was a major priority for her. She'd had her times of undereating and overeating and was thoroughly tired of that merry-go-round. She felt that Point Five eating could help her embody the healthiest relationship with food for her.
But getting there was no small task. She found herself trying Point Five immediately upon learning about it and not succeeding because she was not yet ready. Her therapist suggested she work on her stress management and emotion regulation skills. A year later, she tried Point Five again, and although the first six months were pretty wobbly with her going from Point Five back to Midpoint, she finally succeeded in making Point Five the main part of her program.

In her journey, she also realized that she was not giving herself a break and was demanding Point Five eating of herself at all times. She realized she was being rigid and this was just what she didn't want. She decided to allow herself more freedom and used the whole spectrum, but relied on Point Five as her home base.

Use the Full Spectrum to Improve Your Relationship with Food!

Remember, the goal is not to be able to master every point in the spectrum. It is to have the flexibility with food and eating you want. Some people learn about, but never really practice Point One eating or even Point Five eating because it’s not what they want, it doesn't enhance their life, or they have found better results from eating at the other points on the spectrum.

Max had no desire to use Point Five eating. As he learned about it, he could see that it was beside the point in his life. However, he felt he had benefited from learning techniques for calming down and reducing his anxiety around food and portion control. He and his wife together decided that Point Two and Midpoint Eating would be easiest for both of them.

Max's wife packed him a really healthy, hearty lunch each day, as well as a late afternoon snack to eat on his way home from teaching high school math so he would arrive without excessive hunger. She got into packing healthy snacks for herself each day as well, and noticed how much better she felt. They had breakfast together, and tended to keep it simple, with cereal, nuts, yogurt, and fruit. They would plan meals together and would make up a few interesting menus Wednesday and Friday. Tuesdays and Thursdays were routine with the same dinners eaten each
week, usually consisting of quesadillas and pastas. On the weekends, they decided to go out for Saturday dinners and went to a variety of fun restaurants in their area. Here they could experiment with Thai, Indian, and other cuisines. They were doing Point Two eating during the week, and Point Three on the weekends. They decided for now, this was working. They would revisit this in six months.

The danger point for Max was the teacher's lounge at the high school. During his teaching breaks, it was very tempting to sample the communal junk food which appeared each day. Max liked socializing in the teacher's lounge and did not want to give up this time with his colleagues. He decided to bring a fruit or vegetable plate each week. He learned to sit away from the junk food and to center himself with his breath before he walked into the room. In talking with the other teachers, he realized several were in the same boat as he was and together they made small changes in the placement of the junk food, which was also helpful.

It's very important that we do not add value judgments to the already difficult experience that many of us have with food and eating. Point One eating is not any better or worse than Midpoint or Point Five eating. It's all about the match between you and the style of eating that most helps you grow and develop.

However, some of us would like to master Point Four or Point Five eating because we would like to build up that particular kind of inner capacity to tune in. It often takes a lot of reflection and personal growth to be able to use Points Four and Five effectively. If this describes you and you feel learning Points Four or Five would really enhance your life experience then, by all means, move towards Point Four or Five eating.

Begin your Full Spectrum Eating with a point that feels like it can help you most. When in doubt, begin at Midpoint Eating and see what this feels like. You can always move up and down the spectrum from there.
**Additional Guidance**

**Organic Panic**

Many of us worry about how to eat in a way which spares our beautiful planet more harm. How many of us have eaten or overeaten junk and convenience food, which we know is made in ways which hurt nature and even ourselves? We kick ourselves because we know this is not right, but we are not sure how to handle this conundrum. How "good" can we be? Is this just a new kind of tyranny? Can we ever be right?

Let's face it, unless we're living on a sustainable farm in an isolated area, we're not going to have the capability of helping the planet as much as we might truly wish. While this is sad, it is also realistic and being aware of our realities can help us find the balance we so need. In this case, we can balance our need to be helpful to the planet and its beautiful ecosystems with our lives as we live them. Our lives are complex, busy, and don't fit neatly into one category.

FSE helps us with this balance. For example, Adam felt very strongly about the destruction of the planet through unfair and unkind farming and animal raising practices. However, when he fretted about this and couldn't control his anger, he often wound up either not eating anything and being pretty hungry, or eating organic food for a day or two and then overeating the junk food he loved. Using FSE, he gave himself a Point Two eating two times each week which focused on mostly organic food. The rest of the time, he used Point Three and Point Four eating to mix this food with regular foods which were more accessible with his work.

**When Nothing Helps**

If your food is quite chaotic and you're in the midst of recovering from an eating disorder, you might find that none of these points are very useful. At this tender part in recovery, it can feel like "nothing works." Sometimes it feels like no intervention or psychotherapy, or anything else, is really helping. However, I encourage you to stay with the process of your psychotherapy (or find a therapist specialized in the treatment of eating disorders if you have not yet done so), and obtain the help of, and stay in connection with, your dietician and physician.

As you build self-understanding and self-esteem, slowly, interventions will begin to help. If FSE is of little use to you now, put it aside on the shelf for later. Stick with your treatment program,
and consider adding stress management classes, meditation, or yoga classes. Perhaps, you might try FSE 6 months from now and see if there's more traction.

**Mindful and Mindless**

Mindful eating teaches us to be aware of our relationship with food in the present moment. One can be mindful using any point on the spectrum. For instance, in Point Four eating, we can be mindful of our many choices and how they feel and also mindful of the structure we have imposed from the outside and how we experience it.

Though I won't elaborate here, the work on Mindless Eating, by the gifted social psychologist Dr. Brian Wansink at Cornell University, informs us that in spite of our best efforts, we have innate perceptual biases which effect how we eat and feel about food on a day-to-day basis. Having knowledge of these biases can help us in our mindful pursuit of healthy eating. Being mindful of new knowledge is an important element for personal understanding and growth.

For example, plate size influences how we visually perceive how much food we are eating. Even if we undergo special training for it to not influence us, this influence persists. We could decide to use smaller plates through our outside awareness of this fact. However, if we were in Point Five eating and focusing on inner awareness, and we experienced ourselves getting very full and uncomfortable when we served and ate our dinner on a larger plate, we might use this knowledge, from the inside out, to shift to a smaller plate. This would be out of concern for our tummies and thus a part of our self-care.

As you continue to develop your relationship with food and become more adept at tuning in with your internal awareness, you can begin to integrate outside structures as well. As we grow, we take those outside structures which help us most, and make them a part of our inner life. These can work in tandem. However, the ideal balance between the two will be different for each of us.
Conclusion

Full Spectrum Eating is designed to open your world to some new possibilities in your use of food. It is designed to unlock and unbundle your assumptions about the "right way to eat" and to give you more flexibility in lifestyle choices with food.

For many of us, no matter how we eat, there is an inner voice shaming us and telling us we haven't eaten correctly. Through Full Spectrum Eating, you can empower yourself and be in charge of how much internal and external structure serves you now in regards to food. You can see where you are on the spectrum today and keep tabs on which points will help you as you go forward in your life.

As we focus more on our own needs regarding our eating, and less on various weight management products and viewpoints, we can find the healthiest choices for us today.


**Gratitudes**

I have benefited from the thinking, creativity, compassion, and insights of many people over the years. I have learned from my patients, my friends, my colleagues, my successes, and my mistakes.

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