

HABITUATION EXERCISE

STEP ONE

Make a list

Make a list of the food you enjoy eating but often restrict.

Choose a food from the list. Perhaps choose a food that pushes you outside your comfort zone but is not too intimidating. Be specific about the food, for example, choose the flavour that you want to start with.

STEP TWO

Make a plan

Make a plan about when you want to eat this food.

- Do you want to have it at home or out at a restaurant? You could start by keeping small amount in the house and work up to keeping it fully stocked at home.
- Is it going to be part of a snack or meal or on its own?
- How many times are you going to attempt this food? Research suggests that habituation occurs best if the food is tried four or four times a week.
- Do you want to do this on your own, or do you need some support from a supportive friend or partner?

STEP THREE

Check in with your hunger

Check in with your hunger signals. What sensations can you feel in the body?

If this is difficult, further support can be found in Workshop 2 which explores connecting with our hunger. The hunger scale from Workshop 2 might be useful here.

The best time to do this exercise is when you are experiencing 'gentle hunger', at points 3 or 4 on the hunger scale. If you are feeling over-hungry, stressed or tired it might be better to return to this exercise having eaten something or when you feel calmer.

STEP FOUR

Eat the food you have chosen

Make sure that when you try these foods, you feel calm and safe. Are you feeling in a space where you can listen to your body's physical sensations?

Take a few deep slow breaths.

Eat the food you have chosen according to your plan.

Eat the food slowly and pay attention to your experience.

Try to stay curious about your experience and try not to make any judgements while eating the food.

Focus on the taste, flavours, textures and smell of the food.

STEP FIVE

Reflect

Reflect on your experiences and write your answers down in a journal or notepad.

How was this experience for you?

What did you notice?

How did the food taste? Was it as good as you expected? Or were you disappointed?

There are no wrong answers to these questions. Try to approach this exercise with a sense of curiosity.

STEP SIX

Repeat

Repeat this exercise with the food that you have chosen until you begin to feel less anxiety around this food.

It is normal to repeat this activity several times before you begin to feel like you are giving yourself full permission to eat.

When you have tried this food several times, think about whether your answers to the reflection questions have changed.

If you feel comfortable, you can try this with other foods on your list.