

# Food Rules Exploration

Food rules are typically praised or demonized—but is it really one or the other? **DiETING ADVOCATES** believe food rules are necessary and essential to make progress. After all, in this framework, you must follow the rules of a diet to achieve success! **ANTI-DIET SUPPORTERS**, however, believe that food rules keep us stuck physically and mentally—and do even more harm than good by perpetuating negative emotional eating cycles.

**But is it possible that food rules, dieting, and general “outer wisdom” could support your journey in a way that promotes health, rather than hold you back or add mental distress?** Certainly, it depends on the person—one person’s rules may lead to unhealthy behaviors in one being, but provide support for another being. We also must consider where we are at in this moment emotionally, mentally, and physically. What is true for you now, may not be true in days, weeks, or months. **Your only way to know is to tune in to the here and now (hello, mindfulness!)** and see what’s happening in your experience.

To investigate this, we have to get clear about our **intentions**—our deeper why with those food rules. Below are some common food rules that people turn to on their health or weight loss journeys. Right away, you may have ideas about whether these would serve you or not.

*As you read through this list, pay special attention to what happens in your body. Does reading any of these rules make you feel anything? What do you feel? Where do you feel it? Maintain a sense of nonjudgmental curiosity as you explore how your body responds to each rule, then make a few notes about whatever you notice. (For inspiration, refer to the [feelings list PDF from the Emotional Intelligence lesson.](#))*

- I can only enjoy treats on the weekends.
- I have one designated day each week when I allow myself to enjoy whatever foods I want (i.e., cheat/treat day).
- I only eat foods during certain hours or windows of the day. (I practice intermittent fasting; I only eat two meals per day; I stop eating 3 hours before bed.)
- I don’t allow myself to eat snacks throughout the day, or have rules about what kinds of snacks are permitted.
- If I have a craving, I’ll turn to “healthier” versions of “unhealthy” foods, such as sugar-free, fat-free, or paleo treats.
- Even though I absolutely love \_\_\_\_\_, I never (or hardly ever) eat it because I consider it unhealthy.
- There are certain foods that I can’t keep in the house, or else I’ll be too tempted and lose control.
- There are certain foods or food groups that I consider bad for me, and so it’s better that I avoid them completely (gluten, refined sugar, wheat, dairy, cheese, pizza, bread, pasta, “white” foods, etc.). (These are not being removed due to allergy or because I dislike the food.)
- I must include certain foods or macronutrients during specific meals. (I must eat X servings of veggies per day; I must eat protein at every meal; I can’t eat a carb-heavy meal before bed.)
- I consistently weigh myself every day/week, modifying my diet based on my current weight.
- When I burn X amount of calories during a workout, I reward myself with a food-related treat (i.e., dessert, fast food, a special/favorite meal, etc.).
- After I eat certain “indulgent” foods/meals or X amount of calories, I need a harder/longer/more intense workout.

**Now, reflect on whether and how any of these rules resonate with you.** Make some notes or go even deeper by journaling about these questions (see *today’s journal prompt download*):

- Do any of these food rules feel familiar to you? Mark them or write them down in your journal.
- If so, how does that rule show up in your life, or how has it shown up in the past?
- Does/did the rule serve a purpose for you? Explain.
- Do you feel that this rule is helping you or hurting you on your healthy journey? (Or both?) Why?

**Be willing to question whether a rule that once served you still does—or not.**

The point of this exercise is not to lay out these rules as “good” or “bad,” but rather for you to gain insight as to how rules may be impacting your own journey with health—mentally, physically, and emotionally in your body.

