

Ask Leyla: Why do I feel sick if I don't eat every few hours?

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Q: I have adult female friends who are somewhat overweight who say if they don't eat every three hours they feel nauseous and sick. The foods they eat are not from healthy sources. Is their nausea a withdrawal symptom or a real medical condition?

A: Several things could be at play here. First, those who insist they must eat frequently (every few hours) may either have blood sugar irregularities or adrenal stress/exhaustion (these often go hand in hand). Nausea is a symptom of any number of conditions, but here's what I would consider investigating:

- Food allergy or intolerance
- An adverse reaction to additives/preservatives or artificial ingredients in foods
- Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar)

With food allergy, the concept of allergic addiction is compelling because that's what drives an individual to reach for the same foods over and over again in order to get relief—a fix, if you will—in this case from nausea. Allergic addiction is one of many reasons false hunger and cravings exist. With regard to intolerances or adverse reactions, repeat consumption is unlikely unless they are indeed addicted to those foods (refined carbohydrates—sugar, white flour, MSG). Withdrawal symptoms can include nausea and general malaise, among others.

In some cases, nausea could be the symptom of gastritis or peptic ulcer. This warrants a trip to the doctor or gastroenterologist for a full work up and diagnosis.

Nausea that is relieved by eating is a classic symptom of hypoglycemia and

thus contributes to the need for a nibble every few hours.

Adrenal stress or exhaustion typically occurs when blood sugar issues like hypoglycemia have been ongoing for quite some time. It's the heroic adrenal glands, after all, that are called upon to rescue low blood sugar when there isn't a meal in sight (or more likely, you didn't make time to eat). Years and years of this type of wear and tear on the adrenals will eventually burn them out. Frequent small meals that include quality protein and fats along with appropriate supplementation can help restore adrenal function.

A qualified nutritionist can help to uncover any of these problems and suggest an appropriate treatment plan.

To your health!