

I'm Sorry, I Was Hungry!

MOODY, CRANKY, HUNGRY, TIRED? FIGHTING THE FOOD SWINGS?

Does this sound familiar?

It begins with a low hunger pang deep within the stomach. Soon lethargy sets in. Some people suffer headaches, others feel dizzy. But of all the unpleasant symptoms of hunger, it affects not only the person who is famished but also unsuspecting co-workers, friends and lovers too.

Countless adults admit to being irritable, even hostile, when they are hungry. "I'm sorry, I was hungry" has become a culturally acceptable way to apologize for brusque behavior. One of my clients, Eileen who works in a high-powered legal firm says she relies on the "forgive me I'm hungry" response. "Once I identified those symptoms," she said, "I was able to say, "I'm really hungry right now and I'm sorry. Just give me half an hour and I'll be fine."

A new vernacular has evolved around this behavior, with the afflicted, referring to their nasty moods as "food swings".

Nutrition scientist, Dr. Saltzman, of the United States Department of Agriculture's nutrition Research Center at Tufts University in Boston, says the increasing awareness of hunger's sullen side effects may be in part a byproduct of society's growing obsession with food and dieting. Talking about it, the hungry and crabby speak up and even warn friends and colleagues to steer clear. It gives them a chance to cope without resorting to cursing, weeping or assaulting a candy machine.

Dr. Saltzman went on to say that food swings may be harder to conquer if they are based not on physical hunger but on "emotional hunger," which is triggered by stress, sadness, depression or even boredom. Emotional hunger is harder to satisfy, because you can eat and overeat and still not feel sated."

Ms. Lisa Sasson, a clinical assistant professor in New York University's department of nutrition, food studies and public health tells us that women in particular report hunger-related moodiness. Women sometimes feel that if they are satiated -- if their bellies bulge the tiniest bit beyond flatness -- then they may have overeaten. Some women think that if they feel full, then they "haven't been good."

Much depends on what is put into the body and when. A diet rich in protein, fat and fiber will help stave off hunger, states Dr. Mark Friedman, an associate director of the Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia which conducts research on taste and smell. Your sensitivity to your external environment increases. That may be why, he said, someone playing music in the apartment below may be more irritating when you're hungry than when you're not.

Fighting food swings by eating small amounts throughout the day is a good idea as long as the food is healthy. Squirrel away healthy snacks like string cheese, pretzels, fruit, and trail mix in your purse or desk drawer. If you have late dinner reservations, have a small snack beforehand.