

## conscious eating

I believe our plate is a reflection of our inner state.

—Carly Pollack  
author of *Feed Your Soul*



# BEFRIENDING FOOD

## Embrace the Psychology of Eating

by Marlaina Donato

Anyone that has struggled to lose weight, eat right or deal with an eating disorder is familiar with the emotional battle that can evolve from the simple act of seeking sustenance.

“The black-and-white mentality of needing to be perfect or counting calories leads us into a rabbit hole of bingeing, dieting and stuck in a love/hate relationship with food,” says Carly Pollack, whose new book, *Feed Your Soul: Nutritional Wisdom to Lose Weight Permanently and Live Fulfilled*, comes out next month.

“We live in a society that is obsessed with mainstream media and celebrity culture,” says Pollack. “Poor body image and an unhealthy relationship with food are synonymous. You can’t have one without the other.”

Enter the psychology of eating, a movement built upon a mindset that reshapes our relationship to food, focusing on emotions, beliefs and physiological responses. These insights, grounded in research, offer empowering, new perspectives.

### Mind Games

Nutritional Psychologist Marc David, who highlights research on the food/mind connection in his book *The Slow Down Diet: Eating for Pleasure, Energy, and Weight Loss*, says our thoughts about what is on our plates have even more impact on our physiological responses than vitamins or minerals. Guilt about consuming certain foods can slow digestion and increase chemical responses that store fat, while enjoying the same foods without stress can boost metabolism and nutritional absorption.

“The most important aspect of creating and maintaining a healthy relationship with food is to bring awareness to our thoughts and behaviors around food,” says Pollack, founder of Nutritional Wisdom, a holistic practice based in Austin.

Simplicity, eating real food and unraveling perceptions are paramount. “With all of the information overload out there, ‘eating right’ has turned into ‘eating perfectly,’” Pollack says. “I believe our plate is a reflection of our inner state.”

### Gender Differences

Fear-based approaches to eating generally and eating to cope with emotions are seen often as primarily women’s struggles, but a

high percentage of men also suffer. In fact, according to Marc David's *Institute for the Psychology of Eating*, 40 percent of binge eaters are male.

"Women's food issues spring from the cultural pressure to prioritize their appearance over their wisdom, while men may turn to food to deal with career pressure," says Harriet Morris, who hosts *The Eating Coach* podcast in Shropshire, England. "I've found, too, that both men and women use food as a way to avoid dealing with issues around sexuality, but their needs are very distinct."

Because a man's sense of self is much more linked to his sexuality, food can be used to avoid dealing with aspects of male sexuality he is uncomfortable with, says Morris. "Work with my male clients is about avoiding perfectionism and opting instead for a powerful kind of 'imperfectionism' where strength allows for pleasure. This—not a Marvel superhero—is a real man."

Regardless of gender, changing perspective is key, adds Morris. "Our problem is not food. Bulimia, excess weight, IBS [irritable bowel syndrome] and a whole host of other issues are teachers, not enemies. We have, for very good reasons, been using food as a life manager," she says.

In the end, nourishing ourselves on all levels is what it's all about, says Pollack. "Our relationship with food gives us the opportunity to examine our relationship to ourselves, our sense of worth, who we think we are, what we feel we deserve and how we show up day-to-day in this body for this beautiful life we've been given."

*Marlaina Donato is the author of Multidimensional Aromatherapy. Connect at [AutumnEmbersMusic.com](http://AutumnEmbersMusic.com)*

# Advice From Our Experts

## Carly Pollack:

- ✓ Create guidelines for how you intend to achieve health and happiness. Gather tools that will help you stay focused (nightly journaling, daily visualization, keeping a food log, creating accountability with friends and family).
- ✓ Remember that our mistakes are opportunities to see more clearly what needs to be healed. We'll make mistakes; old patterns will pop up when we least expect them to that'll remind us that this life is a practice, not a perfect.
- ✓ Take a nightly inventory by answering three questions: What did I do today that was great regarding my relationship with food? How can I improve? What will I do tomorrow to put this improvement into action?

## Harriet Morris:

- ✓ Allow for pleasure. We are wired to seek pleasure, because on an evolutionary level, the things that helped us survive made us feel good—and food is one of them. There are ways to find healthy alternatives that satisfy our pleasure-seeking center without the huge price tag.
- ✓ Slow down when you eat. You will feel satisfied sooner and eat less.
- ✓ We might look at how compulsive eating is actually a misguided attempt to deal with other issues. Let's ask, "How can we put food out of that job?"

## HELPFUL LINKS

Harriet Morris' informative podcast,  
The Eating Coach  
[TheShiftInside.com/podcast](http://TheShiftInside.com/podcast)

High-octane inspiration from Carly  
Pollack (YouTube channel)  
[YouTube.com/user/NutritionalWisdom](http://YouTube.com/user/NutritionalWisdom)

The Institute for the  
Psychology of Eating  
[PsychologyOfEating.com](http://PsychologyOfEating.com)