

You Can Build Healthful Habits: Part Two

Dietitians often say that all foods can be part of a healthful eating plan; it's moderation that matters. In *Better Than Before*, habits expert Gretchen Rubin questions whether this is true for everyone.

You may well be a **moderator**, able to have “just a little bit” of something like chocolate or ice cream. Moderators feel like they can have cookies or French fries or whatever food they are trying to control their intake of, just not every day. They indulge only on special occasions or by having a very small amount.



On the other hand, you may be an **abstainer** who is better off giving up these trigger foods completely. When abstainers try to eat some foods in moderation, they wear themselves out thinking about the “forbidden food.” Abstaining doesn't feel like deprivation for these people. It's actually easier because it takes away the decision-making and need for self-control. For example, there's no decision about the cookies because you already decided that you don't eat cookies.

How do you know if you're an abstainer or a moderator? Think about how you'd respond to these questions:

Could you eat just one square of chocolate every day? Moderators say yes. Abstainers say no, because they'd be thinking about the chocolate all day long.

How do you do with strict rules? Moderators don't want to follow them; they feel deprived. Abstainers, on the other hand, find comfort in rules and follow them.

When you indulge in a special food, like cookies or chips, do you have trouble stopping? For moderators, the occasional indulgence is one and done. For abstainers, it may turn into a full-blown binge because they just want more.

Rubin writes that, for moderators, the “first bite tastes the best, and then their pleasure gradually drops, and they might even stop eating before they're finished.” For abstainers, “the desire for each bite is just as strong as for the first bite—or stronger...”

Not to complicate matters, but **you can also be both a moderator and an abstainer**, depending on the food in question.

You know yourself. When trying to eat healthfully, decide if you're an abstainer or a moderator. It may help you keep those healthful habits going for life.

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