

# The Correlation Between Intuitive Eating Practices and Body Appreciation

## Introduction

Intuitive eating (IE) is a flexible way of eating that relies on physiological hunger and satiety cues to determine when to eat instead of relying on situational and external cues (1). It is a framework consisting of 10 principles that are used to guide an individual to improving their relationship with food. Research has shown that dieting is a common practice among the general population, however, it has also proven that dieting is ineffective for sustained weight loss and may influence body image disturbances (1,2). Conversely, intuitive eating is an eating style that has been positively associated with the multidimensional construct of positive body image (1,3). Additionally, some research has also indicated that those who participate in IE have a lower Body Mass Index (BMI) (4).

This study was conducted to determine if there is a correlation between intuitive eating and body image. It was hypothesized that the greater extent to which an individual follows intuitive eating practices, the more positive that individual's body image. Additionally, the study sought to explore if there were relationships between age and body appreciation as well as BMI and intuitive eating practices.

## Methods

Participant recruitment for this study was completed by sharing links and a QR code to the survey at 100 Oaks Mall in Nashville, TN and on personal social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram). Individuals were asked to willingly complete the survey and share it on their platforms if comfortable. The survey was designed using REDCap and consisted of 17 multiple choice and short answer questions (5). Respondents filled out basic demographic data including age, gender, ethnicity, and highest education completed and then answered 4 questions regarding Body Appreciation (BA) and 6 questions regarding Intuitive Eating Practices (IEP). The body appreciation and intuitive eating survey questions are portrayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Each question was evaluated on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). However, question 1 on the Intuitive Eating Assessment Scale was noted to be scored in reverse (5 = never, 4 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 2 = often, 1 = always). Results were analyzed for participants aged 18 years and older. The results were exported from REDCap to Microsoft Excel and analyzed using Chi-square tests and regression analysis.

### Body Appreciation Questions:

1. I respect my body
2. My self-worth is independent of my body shape or weight.
3. I engage in healthy behaviors to take care of my body.
4. Despite its imperfections, I still like my body.

Figure 1: Body Appreciation Survey Questions

### Intuitive Eating Questions:

1. I try to avoid certain foods high in fat, carbohydrates, or calories.
2. If I am craving a certain food, I allow myself to have it.
3. I do NOT follow eating rules or dieting plans that dictate what, when, and/or how much to eat.
4. I am able to cope with my negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, sadness) without turning to food for comfort.
5. I rely on my hunger signals to tell me when to eat.

Figure 2: Intuitive Eating Survey Questions

## References

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## Results

**Demographics:** Data was collected from 101 participants aged 21-86 years old. The two major groups included individuals between the ages of 21-35 (n=32, 32%) and 50-65 (n=37, 37%). The other two groups included individuals between the ages of 35-50 (n=10, 10%) and 65+ (n=18, 18%). Most participants (80%) have completed at least a 4-year college degree (Figure 3).

### Data analysis:

- Chart 1 represents the correlation between Intuitive Eating Practices and Body Appreciation. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the two scales (P-value <0.05)
- Table 1 represents the correlation between different age groups and Body Appreciation. A statistically significant correlation in age groups 18-35 and 35-50 was identified.
- Table 2 represents the correlation between BMI and Intuitive Eating Practices. No statistically significant correlation was found in any BMI category.

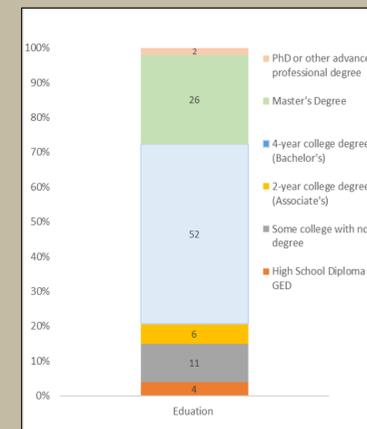


Figure 3: Highest Level of Education Completed

Age	P-value
18-35	0.005
35-50	0.047
50-65	0.440
65+	0.567

Table 1: Correlation between Age Groups and BA

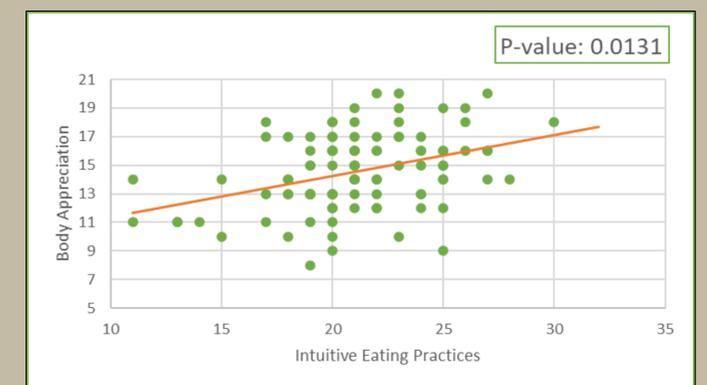


Chart 1: Correlation between IEP and BA

BMI	Ranges	P-value
Normal	18.5-24.9	2.730
Overweight	25-29.9	0.185
Obese, Class I	30-34.9	0.153
Obese, Class II	35-39.9	0.051
Obese, Class III	>40	0.106

Table 2: Correlation between BMI and IEP

## Conclusion

In our study, it was hypothesized that higher adherences to intuitive eating practices would lead to greater individual body appreciation. The findings support this hypothesis based on the identified, statistically significant correlation between intuitive eating practices and body appreciation (P-value: <0.05). The same correlation was found by Spoor et al and in the meta-analysis conducted by Lindaron et al (1, 3).

Additionally, a positive correlation between age and body appreciation was found indicating that there is a higher body satisfaction with increased age. More research is needed to see if age is an independent factor impacting one's appreciation of their body. Therefore, partial acceptance of the research hypothesis concerning the effect of age on body appreciation was concluded.

Lastly, research supports the unbreakable relationship between mind and body (1,2,3,4). Our study was unable to confirm a correlation between BMI and Intuitive Eating Practices (P-value: 6.76). This could be due to the small, nonrandom sample size or due to limited access via social media or on-site participant enrollment. No significant correlation reinforces the idea that there can be health at every size (HAES). As confirmed in our research, those who rely on their own internal intuition, including hunger and satiety cues, have a better relationship with their own bodies and have a higher appreciation of self. Awareness of these correlations informs practitioners of the potential benefits found by promoting the principles of intuitive eating for long-term health success and body appreciation.