



Sylvia R. Karasu M.D.  
The Gravity of Weight

## No Longer, Voice: A Closer Look at Food Noise

Anecdotal accounts of food noise have morphed into something worthy of study.

Posted January 29, 2026



Erysichthon cuts down a sacred tree for which he was severely punished by the gods. By Italian artist Luigi Ademollo, 1832. Private Collection.  
Source: The Stapleton Collection/Bridgeman Images. Used with permission.

### KEY POINTS

- Food noise is a persistent, intrusive preoccupation with food that causes significant psychological distress.
- Researchers began paying attention when patients reported it disappeared when on GLP-1 medications for weight.
- It can be induced by either internal or external cues but can occur without these cues.
- It may have evolved as a 'biological alarm' to seek food, just as thirst signals a need to drink water.

King Erysichthon, so the ancient Roman legend goes (Ovid, Book VIII), was arrogant and contemptuous of the gods, for which he was severely punished: He was made to experience a voracious hunger, a “hurricane of starvation” (Hughes, 1997). All he could think about was his uncontrollable desire to procure food. “In the midst of feasts, he craves other feasts” (Marder, 2025). For Erysichthon, “food calls for food...” (Mandelbaum, 1993).

There is much more to this myth, and it does not end well for the king (Karasu, 2018). For our purposes, though,

Erysichthon's insatiable preoccupation with food, though admittedly with considerable poetic license, is a metaphor for those who experience what we call *food noise*.

Human survival, of course, depends on obtaining food. Ancel Keys began his monumental, almost 1,400-page tome, *The Biology of Starvation* (1950), with "...the history of man is in large part the chronicle of his quest for food. Hunger, or fear of it, has always played a major role in determining the actions and the attitudes of man."

Keys demonstrated that the 36 men who took part in what would come to be called the Minnesota Starvation Experiment exhibited symptoms of depression, irritability, "nervousness," and general emotional instability, with social withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, and loss of any sexual interest. Through the course of six months of semi-starvation, though, food and eating became their dominant concern, an "obsession," "the most important thing" for these human guinea pigs, wrote Kalm and Semba (2005), who interviewed some of these men almost 60 years later. "...if you went to a movie, you weren't particularly interested in the love scenes, but you noticed every time they ate and what they ate," reported one man.

Like Erysichthon, these men were led by circumstances to experience an extreme form of *food noise*, "incessant mental chatter" related to food (Dhurandhar et al., 2025).



Source: Copyright Graham Dean. All rights reserved 2026/Bridgeman Images. Used with permission.

No one knows from whom or where the term *food noise* originated. But it has taken social media by storm in recent years, and there are now thousands of references to it in the lay press, including in *Scientific American* (Young), *The New York Times* (Blum), and *Weight Watchers*. Both the Urban Dictionary and Wikipedia now include it, though the Oxford English Dictionary has yet to create an entry.

The concept grew out of anecdotal reports from patients that their total preoccupation with food lessened or even disappeared—"an uncanny mental silence regarding food" (Cook, 2026)—when they began taking GLP-1 medications, which affect both appetite and the reward circuits of the brain, for weight control (Chong et al., 2026; Lenharo, 2025; Tongta et al., 2025).

Dhurandhar and colleagues (2025) speculate that food noise may have evolved adaptively and developed as a "biological alarm" to remind humans to seek food, just as thirst signals a need for water.

Some researchers emphasize the importance of *external* or even *internal cues* to elicit food noise—"food-cue reactivity" (Hayashi et al., 2023; Hayashi et al., 2025). Cues, such as the smell or availability of food, physical hunger, dieting, or advertising, may induce food noise, but not necessarily. Diktas et al. (2024), who were the first to develop and validate a tool (a five-item questionnaire) to measure food noise clinically, for example, note that patients have described experiencing food noise without food cues.

Researchers such as David B. Allison, formerly the Dean of the School of Public Health at Indiana University and now Chief of Nutrition at the Children's Nutrition Research Center at Baylor in Houston, and his colleagues, have now begun to take food noise seriously (Dhurandhar et al., 2025; 2026), creating "the contours of scientific legitimacy" and providing "valuable visibility for an under-recognized experience" (Dinerstein).

In an attempt to codify food noise more precisely and study it methodically, Allison et al. have created the *Ro-Allison-Indiana-Dhurandhar Food Noise Inventory* (RAID-FN), a

questionnaire that assesses when thoughts of food become distressful (Dhurandhar et al, 2025; 2026).

They found that food noise is a “distinct psychological construct” that may “significantly affect food choices, mental health, and quality of life.” Food noise may exist “to varying degrees” (Dhurandhar et al., 2025) and can occur in the presence of specific eating disorders, such as binge eating (Tongta et al.).



Source: Copyright George Rosaly. All Rights Reserved 2026/Bridgeman Images. Used with permission.

The researchers began with 29 items and conducted four studies, but were able to create a 23-item scale and a shorter seven-item version of their questionnaire that was both reliable and valid in the population they studied. They found that their scale did not differentiate between men and women, nor did it correlate with a person’s body mass index (BMI). Further, their definition focused not only on a preoccupation with food, but food noise as having a “deleterious impact on well-being,” that may lead to dysphoria, anguish, self-stigma, and self-recrimination because it is “intrusive, incessant, and obsessive” (Dhurandhar et al., 2026). In other words, food noise

becomes “clinically relevant” when it is persistent and morphs from thoughts about food into “rumination that interferes with normal cognitive functioning” and presents a significant “cognitive burden” (Dhurandhar et al., 2025).

One caveat that researchers have recognized: Some people may indulge in “diagnostic inflation” (Dinerstein) and exaggerate “in pursuit of some perceived advantage” (Dhurandhar et al., 2026) to qualify for GLP-1 medications, and present themselves as more symptomatic than they are.

Food noise research remains in its infancy and requires further investigation, but it has clearly moved beyond anecdotal reports. As researchers continue to measure it, they will be better able to understand its causes, consequences, and responses to treatment.

**Note:** For the poets among you, my title comes from Rainer Maria Rilke’s *The Seventh Elegy*.

## References

- Blum D. (2023). People on drugs like Ozempic say their ‘food noise’ has disappeared. *The New York Times*: June 21. [nytimes.com/2023/06/21/well/eat/ozempic-food-noise.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/21/well/eat/ozempic-food-noise.html). Retrieved 1/28/26.
- Chong MC et al. (2026). Changes in eating behavior during treatment with obesity medications. *Clinical Obesity* 16: e70065.
- Cook G. (2026). Quieting ‘food noise’: how GLP-1s and mindfulness rewire the default mode network (DMN) and reward circuits. *Cureus*: 18(1): e100818.
- Dhurandhar EJ et al. (2026). Development and rigorous multistep validation of a psychometric tool to measure food noise. *Appetite* 217: 108339.
- Dhurandhar EJ et al (2025). Food noise: definition, measurement, and future research directions. *Nutrition & Diabetes* 15: 30.
- Dinerstein C. (2025). The science and politics of food noise. American Council on Science and Health. [acsh.org/news/2025/11/05/science-and-politics-food-noise-49804](https://acsh.org/news/2025/11/05/science-and-politics-food-noise-49804). Retrieved 1/28/26.
- Diktas HE et al. (2025). Development and validation of the food noise questionnaire. *Obesity* 33: 289-297.
- Hayashi D et al. (2023). What is food noise? A conceptual model of food cue reactivity. *Nutrients*: 15, 4809.
- Hayashi D et al. (2025). Response to ‘Development and validation of the food noise questionnaire.’ (Letter to the Editor). *Obesity*: 33: 1615-1616.
- Hughes T. (1997). *Tales from Ovid*. “Erysichthon.” New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, pp. 79-87.

Kalm LM; Semba RD. (2005). They starved so that others be better fed: remembering Ancel Keys and the Minnesota experiment. *Journal of Nutrition* 135: 1347-52.

Karasu S. (2018). "The Madness of Hunger." *Hektoen International*, Summer. [hekint.org/2018/08/21/the-madness-of-hunger/](http://hekint.org/2018/08/21/the-madness-of-hunger/). Retrieved 1/29/26.

Keys A. et al. (1950) *The Biology of Human Starvation*, Volumes I (p.3) and II (pp. 905-918). Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

Lenharo M. (2025). Obesity drugs quiet 'food noise' in the brain—here's how. *Nature* 647, November 27: 828-829.

Marder M. (2025). *Metamorphoses Reimagined*. "Sometimes: Proteus, The Daughter of Erysichthon, and Erysichthon" (Liber VIII, 730-874). New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 173-177.

Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid, a New Verse Translation* (1993). Allen Mandelbaum, translator. Book VIII: "Erysichthon's Sin." New York: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc, pp, 277-283.

Rilke RM. (2009). *The Poetry of Rilke*. "The Seventh Elegy," pp. 321-325. Translated and Edited by Edward Snow. New York: Northpoint Press, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Tongta S, Sungkaworn T, Pathomthongtaweetchai N. (2025). Neurobiological mechanisms and therapeutic potential of glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists in binge eating disorder: a narrative review. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* 26: 10974.

Weight Watchers Clinic, STOP Obesity Alliance (2024). Beyond hunger: understanding food noise. January 16: [weightwatchers.com/us/food-noise](http://weightwatchers.com/us/food-noise). Retrieved: 1/27/26.

Young LJ. (2024). Ozempic quiets food noise in the brain—but how? *Scientific American*: June 25.

## About the Author

---



**Sylvia R. Karasu, M.D.**, is a clinical professor of psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College and the senior author of *The Gravity of Weight*.

Online: [my own website](#)

**Psychology Today**