Dear Reader,

Living with a roommate, whether it is family, a friend, or total stranger, almost always leads to conflict at one point or another. But that's okay! Negotiating healthy boundaries with your roommate can be a great step toward making living together a positive experience for both people. Below are some strategies you may want to consider using to make sure that your roommate only eats your food when you give her permission.

Perhaps the most obvious thing you could do is, have a conversation with your roommate about the missing food. This can be done politely by asking your roommate if she has been eating your food or if someone visiting her might have been eating your food. If she admits responsibility (for herself or her guests) you can simply ask that she stop. If not, you may need to be firmer about your suspicion while trying to consider if there is any other way your food could have disappeared. If your roommate gets offended, try to stay relaxed and explain that you aren't angry and that you just don't want it to happen again.

Alternatively, you may want to consider clearly labeling your food or keeping it secure in your bedroom or a personal refrigerator. This strategy could also be helpful if talking to your roommate doesn't make a difference. You could even shop only for the food you need that day as a way of keeping your roommate from having access to your uneaten food.

In cases like these sometimes an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It's often suggested that at the beginning of living together roommates decide on a roommate agreement. Such an agreement sets up rules and expectations for a range of issues such as having company over, how to pay for shared utilities, and when, if ever, it is okay to use each other's stuff. Even if it's been a while since you and your roommate started living together, if there are ongoing conflicts that could have been avoided with a roommate agreement, you may want to suggest creating one to make things easier going forward.

It's also possible that your roommate isn't eating your food because she's inconsiderate. Her taking your food may be connected to a larger problem such as an eating disorder. If you are concerned that this may be the case you might want to make some time to talk privately...
with her about it. Since the potential of your roommate having some kind of eating disorder is a sensitive topic, you may want to proceed with some care. It is recommended that in your discussion you try to focus on expressing your concern for her health and not the missing food. Before you speak to her you may want to educate yourself about eating disorders such as bulimia and the various resources out there for people who struggle with eating disorders.

If none of the above tactics work, or you would just be more comfortable with another person to mediate the discussion, you might want to select a person that both you and you roommate trust to help you both talk about this challenging issue. If after that, your roommate still refuses to respect your boundaries, you may want to consider whether or not you want to modify your living situation by moving out or getting a new roommate.

Alice!
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