

## A Guide to Mindful Eating



Mindful eating is simply eating with awareness. How many times have you eaten and not even realized what you ate or better yet, how much? We all know that *what* we eat is important. But so is *how* we eat. In our world of multitasking, it's easy to think about mealtimes as something to “fit in” to our schedules rather than taking the time to really enjoy our food. If you want to achieve or maintain a healthy weight, improve your relationship with food, or just want to enjoy your food more, the following mindful eating tools can help.

### Know when to eat and when to stop.

- Ask yourself: How hungry am I? Rate your hunger using the scale below before, during, and after your meal. Ideally, you want to eat when your hunger is at a 3-4 (mild hunger) and stop when you are at a 7-8 (comfortable).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Starving		Mild Hunger				Comfortable			Stuffed

- If you skip meals or wait too long to eat you tend to eat faster and overeat. You may also find it harder to make better food choices when you let yourself get too hungry.
- As your meal progresses, be aware of your fullness cues and stop eating when you feel satisfied (no longer hungry) – even if there is still food on your plate. Do something to finalize eating, such as push away your plate, cover it with a napkin, clear the table, wrap up leftovers, brush your teeth or chew some gum.
- Notice how you feel when you are finished eating. If you overate, note how uncomfortable you feel (physically and emotionally) when you are overly full and decide what you will do to lessen the chance that you will overeat next time.
- Be aware of *why* you are eating. Are you truly hungry or are you eating for emotional reasons, such as stress, boredom, or for comfort? If you find you want to eat because of *emotional* hunger rather than *physical* hunger, it is important to have a plan to help manage these emotions that does not involve food. Make a list of activities *you* enjoy (such as read a book, go for a walk, call a friend, or write in a journal) and refer to this list when needed.

### Eat sitting down without distractions.

- Eating while sitting at the table allows you to focus on the food in front of you. It is hard to feel satisfied when you quickly eat something while standing in front of the refrigerator or walking out the door.
- Studies show that you eat more when you are doing something else, as your mind is focused on the activity rather than on the experience of eating. Try to avoid multitasking while eating, such as watching TV, sitting in front of the computer, working at your desk, eating in the car...or anything that takes your mind away from eating.
- If eating without distractions is not possible for all meals, make it a point to enjoy at least one meal each day without doing anything else, with the exception of conversation.



## Focus on each mouthful; engage all 5 senses when you eat.

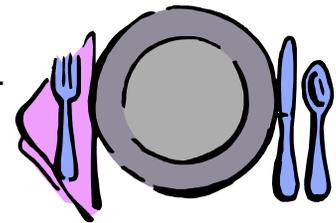
- What does the food *look* like? What does it *smell* like? What does it *feel* like in your mouth? Can you *hear* it in your mouth? What does it *taste* like?
- Savor the food as you chew. Be “in the moment” when you eat, especially the first few bites of each meal. This can help set the atmosphere for a mindful meal.
- The goal of mindful eating is to quiet your thoughts and be present in the eating process. If you find your mind wandering, let those thoughts pass and try to return to the experience of eating.

## Slow down when eating and chew your foods well.



- Use the “20/20” rule. Try chewing each bite *at least* 20 times before swallowing and take *at least* 20 minutes to enjoy your meal.
- Chewing foods well helps you to digest your food better – which means less gas and bloating.
- Did you know it takes your stomach about 20 minutes to produce hormones that tell your brain that you are full? If you slow down, you give yourself more time to feel full. This gives you a better chance of stopping before you “get stuffed.”
- Here are some ideas to slow down your eating pace:
  - Set your fork down after each bite and do not pick it up until you are done swallowing. Often times we have the next bite “ready to go” before we are done swallowing.
  - Eat with chopsticks or with your non-dominant hand.
  - Take time to enjoy conversations while you eat. Do not think you are in a race or need to “get this over with”. Try to be the last one to finish your meal.
  - Pause between bites and sip a glass of water or other calorie-free beverage. In addition to slowing down your meal, this may help you feel fuller and eat less at mealtimes.

## Be mindful of your portion sizes.



- Read the serving size on food labels to keep your portions in check. You may find you are eating several servings without realizing it.
- Use smaller plates and bowls – a smaller salad plate that looks full is more satisfying than a larger dinner plate that looks half empty.
- Keep in mind that the more food that is put in front of us the more we tend to eat. To avoid eating too much, try these portion control tips:
  - Put your food on a plate or in a bowl instead of eating right out of the package.
  - Plate your food at the stove instead of serving family style on the table.
  - When eating out, ask for a container with your meal so you can put half your entrée aside before you start eating.
- When you eat with awareness you will find that smaller amounts of your favorite foods can be really satisfying. If you have a strong craving for a certain food, have a small serving (eat it mindfully to fully enjoy it) and move on!



## Start small and be realistic.

- To experience the difference that mindful eating can make, try eating the first half of your meal at a faster pace while doing another activity (such as watching television or sitting in front of the computer) and then eat the second half of your meal with awareness, using the techniques above. Compare these experiences for yourself.
- Commit to focusing on mindful eating one meal each day that makes the most sense for you. Or, make it a goal to eat the first few bites of each meal with awareness.
- Be realistic. Sometimes you will have to eat quickly or multitask during a meal. The point is to be aware of the *how* and *why* of your eating.
- Recruit a family member or friend to learn mindful eating with you so you can share your experiences and support one another.
- Remember, mindful eating takes practice! It will become easier the more often you do it. Each time you eat mindfully, even for a few bites, you are making progress.

## Try this mindful eating exercise with a partner:

You will need one small apple slice for each person. One person reads the instructions below while the other person completes the exercise. Pause for a few seconds between each step.

- 1) Pick up the apple slice and notice what it looks like. See what it smells like. Take one bite and close your eyes. Do not begin chewing yet.
- 2) Try not to pay attention to any thoughts in your mind, just focus on the apple. Notice the taste, texture, temperature, and sensation in your mouth.
- 3) Begin chewing slowly, just noticing what it feels like. If you find your mind wandering, let your thoughts pass and return to the experience of eating.
- 4) Continue chewing slowly. See if you can stay present in the moment as you begin to transition from chewing to swallowing.
- 5) As you prepare to swallow the apple, try to follow it moving toward the back of your tongue and into your throat. Swallow the apple, following it until you can no longer feel any sensation of the food remaining.
- 6) Take a deep breath and open your eyes. Talk to your partner about your experience. How did it feel to eat with intention, to eat without distraction, just to focus on the food?

## Mindful eating resources for more information:

### BOOKS

- *Mindful Eating*. Jan Chozen Bays. 2009
- *Eat, Drink, and Be Mindful*. Susan Albers. 2009
- *50 Ways to Soothe Yourself Without Food*. Susan Albers. 2009
- *Intuitive Eating*. Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch. 2003
- *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat*. Michelle May. 2009
- *The Rules of "Normal" Eating*. Karen Koenig. 2005

### WEBSITES

- [www.mindfuleating.org](http://www.mindfuleating.org)
- [www.eatingmindfully.com](http://www.eatingmindfully.com)
- [www.intuitiveeating.com](http://www.intuitiveeating.com)
- [www.AmIHungry.com](http://www.AmIHungry.com)
- [www.eatingnormal.com](http://www.eatingnormal.com)