



Mindful Eating

How often do you eat while distracted? In today's busy world, it is all too common to eat while standing, driving, working on the computer, and/or watching TV, etc. All of these distractions take away from experiencing the act of eating in the moment or from the act of "mindful eating". Focusing on what and how we eat can assist in changing thoughts and behaviors related to food. If you regularly make poor food choices or overeat, practicing mindful eating may help you improve your eating habits.

What is Mindful Eating?

Mindfulness is the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present.¹ Mindful eating involves cultivating a heightened sense of awareness to the sensation of hunger and to the sensation of being comfortably full or just satisfied. It also involves using all of your 5 senses - sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell while eating your food.

Before a morsel is purchased, picked up, delivered, created, or brought to one's lips the questions to ask are:

- Am I physically hungry?**
- How physically hungry am I on a scale of 1 - 10?** 1 = starving. 10 = stuffed. 5-6 = satisfied
- What are my flavorful, nutritious options versus just something to fill the void?**

Hormones and Weight Loss

A healthy body has two hormones, leptin and ghrelin, to assist with energy balance and maintenance. Leptin lets the brain know you are full and ghrelin signals hunger.² Both of these hormones are part of the larger equation that support why body weight is not erratic and can be maintained for years at a time. In weight gain, however, these signals of energy balance begin to get ignored (you eat food for reasons other than physical hunger, skip meals, or you overeat – eat until you are stuffed versus satisfied) and/or poor food choices override caloric needs (you eat/drink "empty calorie" foods/beverages in larger amounts).

Ten Steps to Practice when Eating with Food in Mind

The following steps will walk you through a simple mindful eating technique that you can adapt to fit your needs. To begin mindfully eating, observe the whole experience and note it. The key is to slowly move through the following steps.

1. Look at your food.
2. Smell your food.
3. Touch it, (if finger food).
4. Allow a bite to be put in your mouth and hold it there for a few seconds. Notice your mouth and mind's response. Taste it. Is it savory, spicy, sweet, and/or sour?
5. Chew slowly, at least 5 to 10 times. Is it crunchy, smooth, dry, or wet?
6. Swallow, notice it going down.
7. Stop, drink a little water.
8. For each bite, start with number 1 and slowly move through to number 7.
9. Every few bites, ask yourself if you have had enough. Are you satisfied? You don't want to be full, stuffed, or feel like you can't hold anymore. The question is, "Have you had enough to not be hungry, but to be satisfied?" Remember, eating slowly allows the brain to catch up with the body's state of satiety.³
10. Repeat until you are not hungry anymore (about a 5 on the hunger scale).

When your mind wanders (and it will) gently remind yourself to eat with intention and take in the whole experience moment by moment.⁴ The benefits enjoyed by mindful eating include truly tasting your food, eating only until hunger is removed and being satisfied with the whole experience. Practice often and delight in the simplicity of eating!

To help get you started, the Navy's Health Promotion and Wellness Department's Relax-Relax Toolkit offers a mindfulness section with an audio presentation on <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/psychological-emotional-wellbeing/relax-relax/pages/mindfulness.html>

¹Brown K., Ryan R. The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-being. <http://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2003BrownRyan.pdf>. Published September 2002. Accessed February 2014.

²Klok MD, Jakobsdottir S., Drent ML. The role of leptin and ghrelin in the regulation of food intake and body weight in humans: a review. *Obesity Review*. January 2007. 8(1):21-34. <http://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17212793>. Accessed 03 February, 2014.

³Andrade AM Greene GW, Melanson KJ. Eating slowly led to decreases in energy intake within meals in healthy women. *Journal of American Dietetics Association* 2008 July 108 (7):1186-91. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18589027> eating slowly saves calories. Accessed 03 February 2014.

⁴Kabat-Zinn, J. Full Catastrophe Living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness. pp 27-29. New York, New York: Dell Publishing; 1990.

Klok MD, Jakobsdottir S., Drent ML. The role of leptin and ghrelin in the regulation of food intake and body weight in humans: a review. *Obesity Review*. January 2007. 8(1):21-34. <http://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17212793>. Accessed 03 February, 2014.