



Eating with Food in Mind *to Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right*

How often do you eat while distracted? It is commonplace to eat while standing, driving, working on the computer, or watching TV. All of these distractions take away from the food experience of the moment. 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 and enjoy the taste of eating right.

What is Mindful Eating?

Mindfulness is the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present.¹ In daily life, it is easy for thoughts to stray from the present moment to something in the past or to what is yet to come. Simply put, being mindful is completely experiencing the moment with all of your senses. The quality of engaging all five senses make mindfulness a perfect behavior change strategy to use with eating. Apply the sense of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell to every food encounter. In addition, cultivate a heightened awareness of the sensation of hunger and your level of fullness.

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 hungry am I?
 - On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being very hungry and 10 being completely stuffed; 5 is content, neither hungry nor full.
- What are my flavorful, nutritious options versus something to fill the void

A healthy body has two hormones, leptin and ghrelin, to assist with energy balance maintenance. Levels of leptin let the brain know you are adequately fueled and ghrelin signals hunger.² They are a part of the larger equation that supports why body weight is not erratic and can be maintained for years at a time. In weight gain, often these signals of energy balance and hunger begin to get ignored and/or poor food choices are made that are way beyond the caloric intake needed to be satisfied or leave the state of hunger behind.

When making an effort to lose weight, know that a sense of hunger will occur often. Once you decide that you are hungry enough to eat, perhaps a three (3) on the hunger scale, take a moment to observe your environment and focus on your food for five or ten minutes. Take in every aspect of it before you take the first bite. Questions you might ask yourself to keep your focus include: Is it visually appealing? How does it smell? Do you feel the heat rising



from it? Is it nutritious? Move your thoughts to how you plan to eat it. Do you have everything you need to avoid distractions and enjoy the taste of your food?

Ten Steps to Practice when Eating with Food in Mind

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

1. Look at your food.
2. Smell your food.
3. Touch, if finger food.
4. Allow a bite to be put in your mouth and hold there for a few seconds. Notice your mouth and mind's response. Taste it. Is it savory, spicy, sweet, 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).

It is an art to be mindful. 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 Health Promotion and Wellness Department's Relax Relax Toolkit offers a mindfulness section with an audio presentation of [Mindful Eating](#).

¹Brown K., Ryan R. The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-being. http://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2003_BrownRyan.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.