

## MINDFUL EATING GUIDE

Welcome! Thank you for your interest in mindful eating. I trust this guide will feel supportive in your process of harmonizing your relationship to food, cooking and eating.

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### WHAT IS MINDFUL EATING?

Mindful eating involves paying full attention to the experience of eating and drinking, both inside and outside the body.

We pay attention to the colors, smells, textures, flavors, temperatures, and even the sounds (crunch!) of our food.

We pay attention to the experience of the body. Where do we feel hunger? Where do we feel satisfaction? What does half-full feel like?

We also pay attention to the mind. Without judgment, we watch when the mind gets distracted, pulling away from full attention to what we are eating or drinking. We watch the impulses that arise after we've taken a few sips or bites: to grab a book, to turn on the TV, to distract the mind in some way.

Now, we have a choice. When we notice that the mind is distracted, we can follow the distraction and stop eating.

Alternatively, we can return to just being present with our food and the work of eating it.

As we begin to pay attention to how specific foods impact our body, we can start to make better choices about what foods to buy and eat.

When we focus our thoughts on our food as we eat it, we are likely to eat less, reduce stress, and to better digest what we eat. I believe this practice goes beyond mindful eating. It brings joy, awakens the intuition, and helps us hear our body's messages about what it needs.

Mindful eating can inspire us to consider where our food comes from and how we might be doing harm by choosing corporate food that's grown and harvested by [workers who have poor working conditions](#) and do not receive fair wages.

The habit of eating without paying attention can be hard to change. Lasting change takes time, and is built on many small changes. We start simply. Pick your mindful eating homework:

- ❖ Try taking the first four sips of a cup of hot tea or coffee with full attention.
- ❖ If you are reading or watching TV while eating, try doing only one or the other once this week.
- ❖ At family or group meal, you might ask everyone to eat in silence for the first few minutes.

## BALANCED BREATHING

Before a meal, it's great to pause and breathe deeply. This practice helps you calm down, digest your food better, and also strengthens your immune system by pumping your lymph.

Before you begin, sit down. Take a deep breath in and out. Now, practice balanced breathing.

Breathe in for 4 counts, hold the breath for 2 counts, breathe out for 4 counts, hold the breath for 2 counts.

Do this three times.

## MINDFUL EATING EXERCISE

*With gratitude to the Mindfulness Diet for this inspiration*

The following exercise is simple and will only take a few minutes.

Find a small piece of food, such as one raisin or a nut. You can use any food that you like. Eating with mindfulness is not about deprivation or rules.

Begin by exploring this little piece of food, using as many of your senses as possible. First, look at the food. Notice its texture. Notice its color.

Now, close your eyes or soften the gaze, and explore the food with your sense of touch. What does this food feel like? Is it hard or soft? Grainy or sticky? Moist or dry?

Notice that you're not being asked to think, but just to notice different aspects of your experience, using one sense at a time. This is what it means to eat mindfully.

Before you eat, explore this food with your sense of smell. What do you notice?

Now, begin eating. No matter how small the bite of food you have, take at least two bites to finish it. Take your first bite. Please chew *very* slowly, noticing the actual sensory experience of chewing and tasting.

Remember, you don't need to think about your food to experience it. You might want to close your eyes for a moment to focus on the sensations of chewing and tasting, before continuing.

Notice the texture of the food; the way it feels in your mouth.  
Notice if the intensity of its flavor changes, moment to moment.

Take about 20 more seconds to *very slowly* finish this first bite of food, being aware of the simple sensations of chewing and tasting. It isn't always necessary to eat slowly in order to eat with mindfulness. But it's helpful at first to slow down, in order to be as mindful as you can.

Now, please take your second and last bite. As before, chew very slowly, while paying close attention to the actual *sensory* experience of eating: the sensations and movements of chewing, the flavor of the food as it changes, and the sensations of swallowing. Just pay attention, moment by moment.

## **FOOD, MOOD AND COOKING**

When we reach for a treat or crave a certain food, what do we really need?

Try stop, take a breath, and ask yourself this question before you eat. Sometimes, we might need water, exercise, fresh air, a hug, a conversation with a friend, or the fragrance of a flower.

What is true nourishment? Of course, we must eat to live. Because this is true, it might seem that cooking and eating would be a major focus of our lives. However, our culture has provided us with packaged and prepared foods for purchase so that we can spend our time doing other things instead of cooking.

Do we gain the same satisfaction from eating foods prepared by factories as we do from cooking a meal at home and sharing it with friends? Mindful eating can help us tune it to the emotions connected to food.

## **THE PRACTICES OF A MINDFUL EATER**

One way to incorporate mindfulness into your meals is to simply use the breath. Before eating, make a practice of pausing. Breathe in and out a few times so that you can be one with the food you are about to eat. Mindful eating takes dedicated practice, and there are six practices that you can develop to help you eat mindfully for good health.

### **1. HONOR THE FOOD. START THE MEAL WITH ONE OF THESE AFFIRMATIONS.**

- This food is the gift of the whole universe: the earth, the sky, and all beings.
- May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude.
- May everyone have access to plenty of healthy food.
- May this food help me be healthy, strong, and at peace.
- I eat this food to nurture myself and strengthen my community.

Try to eat at least one meal a week in silence so that you are fully immersed in the experience of eating.

### **2. ENGAGE ALL SIX SENSES.**

As you serve and eat your meal, notice the sounds, colors, smells and textures as well as your mind's response to them, not just the taste. When you put the first bite of food in your mouth, pause briefly before chewing and notice its taste as though it was the first time you had ever tasted it. With more practice in engaging all of your senses, you may notice that your tastes change, increasing your enjoyment of what you may once have perceived as "boring" health foods.

### **3. SERVE IN MODEST PORTIONS.**

Moderation is an essential component of mindful eating. Not only does making a conscious effort to choose smaller portions help you avoid overeating and weight gain; it is also less wasteful of your household food budget and our planet's resources. Using a small dinner plate, no larger than 9 inches across, and filling it only once can help you eat more moderately.

### **4. SAVOR SMALL BITS, AND CHEW THOROUGHLY.**

Consciously choosing smaller bites and chewing them well can help you slow down your meal as well as allow you to fully experience the taste of your food. It can also help improve your digestion, since the process of breaking down our foods begins with enzymes in the mouth. Chew each bite until the food is liquefied in your mouth. Chewing well allows your tongue and palate to taste the food better. Once you have swallowed this bite, you will still be able to savor the wonderful taste that the food offers you.

## 5. EAT SLOWLY AND AVOID OVEREATING.

Eating slowly may help you notice when you are feeling pleasantly satisfied so that you can stop before you have eaten too much. There is a difference between feeling that you have had just about enough to eat and feeling as though you have eaten all that you can possibly eat. Mindful eaters practice the former so that they are not overtaxing their bodies — or overtaxing the planet’s resources — by consuming more food than they need. In Chinese medicine, it is recommended to eat only until you are 80 percent full and never to “top off your tummy,” because this weakens the digestive power of your stomach and intestines, putting too much stress on them over the long haul. One way to slow down is to consciously put your eating utensils down in between bites. Be aware of your body as you eat. When we eat mindfully, we are relaxed and calm. There is no rush to attend to other tasks; there is no hurry. There is only the present moment.

## 6. DON'T SKIP MEALS.

Skipping meals can make it harder to make mindful choices. When hunger consumes us, the strong forces of habit energy may lead us to grab whatever foods are close at hand — be they from a vending machine or a fast-food restaurant — and these foods may not further our healthy-eating or weight-loss goals. Give yourself the opportunity to make mindful choices throughout the day; plan regular meals and, if it suits you, healthy snacks in between. It is also good to eat your meals at the same time each day, to help your body settle into a consistent rhythm. Give yourself enough time to fully savor your food so that you are aware of all the sensory delights your meals have to offer.

## RESOURCES

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