



Mindful Eating

By Dr Naomi Crafti

Mindfulness is about being present, being aware of your behaviour, thoughts and emotions. It is very easy to eat in a mindless way, preoccupied with other activities like watching television and reading the paper, thinking about things that have or will happen in the day and eating to fill a void or cover pain in your life. Practicing mindful eating can help you enjoy food, keep in touch with the body's signals of hunger and satiety and generally enhance your well being.

Mindfulness is a concept based in Buddhist philosophy and rests on four foundations. These foundations are:

- Mindfulness of Mind
- Mindfulness of Body
- Mindfulness of Thoughts
- Mindfulness of Feelings

Practicing mindful eating involves strengthening all these foundations. Mindful eating is not a diet. Mindful eating is about the *way* we eat, not *what* we eat.

Mindfulness is about noticing how we *really* feel, it's not about 'playing games' with our thoughts or using external cues (like restrictive diets) to tell us when and what we should eat. When you stop and listen to your body's signals you may indeed find that you are satisfied before you clear your plate, you might also realize that your body wants more or different foods.

Mindless eating is common because from a very early age we are trained to eat in response to external cues (time of day, availability of certain foods, for comfort, to alleviate boredom, out of habit, to clear our plate, as a reward) rather than in response to hunger. An increasing body of research now indicates that many of the behaviours associated with mindless eating do contribute to both weight gain and eating disorders (Brian Wansink, 2006, *Mindless Eating: Why we eat more than we think*, Bantam Dell: New York).

Mindful Eating Strategies

Mindful eating techniques can help reduce the likelihood of binge eating. These include:

1. Eating small or moderate amounts of food every 2-3 hours.
2. Before eating asking a few basic questions
 - a. Am I hungry?
 - b. Am I thirsty?
 - c. If so, what type of food/drink do I want?
3. Setting a nice place to eat and arranging food nicely on the plate. **DO NOT EAT STANDING OR WALKING**
4. Relaxing (3 deep breaths) before beginning to eat
5. Eating slowly, paying attention to the smell, taste, sound, texture and look of the food.

6. Put utensils or food down between mouthfuls.
7. Every few minutes check in with your hunger signals
8. Stop eating before you feel full and wait 10-20 minutes before eating more food if you are hungry.
9. ENJOY YOUR MEAL!!!! If you don't enjoy eating you will never be satisfied.

You might also like to try journaling, which is a Mindfulness based practice. Any form of writing or journaling can increase mindfulness. A person should use a method or technique of journaling that suits them and is sustainable over a long period of time. Some people like to carry a notebook or journal around with them, some people keep a journal to write in before they go to bed. Others keep a food diary or notes on their computer. It doesn't really matter what you write, it can be a list of foods you ate, a poem, a description of your feelings or a drawing.

Yoga, meditation and walking meditation are also mindfulness based activities you might like to try.

A Mindful Bite

Here is a simple mindful eating exercise you can do at home to practice the skill of eating mindfully.

1. Choose one piece of food. It might be a raisin, a slice of mandarin, a potato chip or a chocolate.
2. Begin by looking at the food. Examine the shape colour and texture.
3. Bring the food to your nose and smell it.
4. Place the food on your tongue. Notice the response of your salivary glands.
5. Take a bite and be aware of the sounds in your mouth and the texture on your tongue.
6. Notice how the texture of the food changes as you chew.
7. Now swallow. Pay attention as the food travels down your throat to your stomach.
8. Now say the name of the food silently to yourself.
9. Try practicing a mindful bite at least once every meal.

References:

Susan Albers, 2008, *Eat, Drink and be Mindful*, New Harbinger Publications: California

Brian Wansink, 2006, *Mindless Eating: Why we eat more than we think*, Bantam Dell: New York

