

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. 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 5 - 6 = Satisfied 10 = Stuffed

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. 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).

Learn and Practice Mindful Eating

Jon Kabat-Zinn created this Mindful Eating Exercise (or Raisin Meditation) to help you practice mindful eating and reduce stress when eating. Practice this method with a "single raisin" (or, you can substitute a single, "Hershey's® Kiss"). Before beginning, gauge your hunger on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being famished and 10 being stuffed. Move slowly through the following steps:

1. **HOLDING, SEEING, TOUCHING:** Look at the raisin. Examine it as if you are an alien and have never seen such a thing before. What do its features look like? How does it fit into your hand? How do the ridges feel on the pads of your fingers?
2. **SMELLING:** Smell your food. Hold the raisin to your nose and smell its aroma. Really get a sense of it. Does the smell arouse your senses? Does your mouth or stomach react?
3. **PLACING:** Place the raisin on your tongue. Just hold it there. Examine the raisin with your mouth without chewing it. How are you reacting? How does the raisin feel? Touch it (if finger food).
4. **TASTING:** Place the raisin between your teeth and bite. Notice the adjustments and placements your mouth and tongue take in order to bite this raisin. When you bite, notice the texture. Note the flavors as they release. Pause after a few bites and experience the flavor and texture in your mouth. Continue chewing and noticing. Does the taste change?
5. **SWALLOWING:** Note the intention to ingest and the position your mouth takes. Finally, swallow the raisin.

When your mind wanders (and it will) gently remind yourself to eat with intention and take in the whole experience moment by moment. The benefits enjoyed by mindful eating include truly tasting your food, eating only until hunger is removed and being satisfied with the whole experience. Try these steps at your next meal. Pause halfway through your meal and ask yourself,

"Am I still hungry?"

"Am I getting full?"

"Does that next bite look good to me, or am I already satisfied?"

Pausing, breathing, and reflecting on your food brings you out of your head and back to the table. It helps you stay present and avoid overeating. Practice often and delight in the simplicity of eating!