Mindful Eating

What is *mindful eating*? Also called *intuitive eating*, mindful eating is an approach to eating that teaches you how to create a healthy relationship with your food, mind, and body—where you ultimately become the expert of your own body.

Many people have a negative relationship with food. Why the bad attitude? Some reasons may include:

- Social pressure to be the "perfect" size.

- Having established "good" and "bad" foods.

- Failure to recognize the difference between physical and emotional feelings.

- Fad diets that promote unhealthy eating habits.

Practicing mindful eating encourages people to:

- Distinguish between physical and emotional hunger to better understand your body's physical hunger cues rather than react to external factors.

- Get rid of "food worry" and bring back the joy in eating.

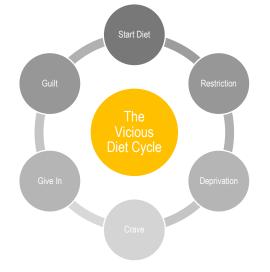- Eliminate "good" and "bad" food theories.

How to Incorporate Mindful Eating

- Limit your use of social media – stars, celebrities, and peers can create an "ideal" yet unrealistic image.

- Fad diets are hard to avoid when they make claims of quick and fast weight loss – don't get drawn into the hype!

- It can be difficult to know who to trust for nutrition advice – registered dietitians (RDs) are the true nutrition experts and can help with intuitive eating.

- Life is hard, and health is often low on people's priority list – take time to create a healthy relationship with food.

Try It: Mindful Eating Exercise

- Start at home; fix yourself a meal or snack.

- Give your full attention to your food—no distractions!

- Take three breaths.

    o Release tension and stress; give yourself permission to relax.

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- o Know your hunger will pass.
- o Inhale the present and exhale your worries (e.g., thoughts of tasks, projects, deadlines).
- Pause to reflect on and appreciate your food.
- Allow yourself to become aware of your current emotions (e.g., stress, anxiety, resentment, frustration, anger, boredom, feeling rushed).
- Pause and take another breath.
  - o Recognize the delight, curiosity, contentment, joy, and anticipation in eating.
  - o Allow the meal to be enjoyable.
- Take a bite; use all your senses to notice everything about the food as you eat.

Ten Principles of Mindful Eating

1. Reject the diet mentality. Get rid of all the physical and mental woes of diets.
2. Honor your hunger. Don't let your body reach the point of excessive hunger, because that's when normal, controlled eating goes out the window
3. Make peace with food. Give yourself unconditional permission to eat so you won't have feelings of deprivation
4. Challenge the "food police." Say "NO" to thoughts in your head that declare you're "good" for eating minimal calories or "bad" because you ate a piece of chocolate cake.
5. Respect your fullness. Listen for body signals that tell you when you are no longer hungry.
6. Discover the satisfaction factor: When you eat what you really want, in an environment that is inviting and conducive, it helps you feel satisfied and content.
7. Honor your feelings without using food. Find ways to comfort, nurture, distract, and resolve your issues without using food.
8. Respect your body. Accept your genes, set realistic goals, and love the skin you're in.
9. Exercise and feel the difference. Get active and focus on how you feel rather than how many calories you burn.
10. Honor your health. What you eat consistently over time is what matters—not having a perfect diet.

Sources: The Center for Mindful Eating (thecenterformindfuleating.org), The Original Intuitive Eating Pros (intuitiveeating.org),
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (eatright.org)

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