

Practice Mindful Eating

Instead of snacking to cure boredom, treat stress or stay awake, try chewing food slowly and savoring the flavor to help achieve ideal weight.

by Erin Wiley
Community contributor

Have you ever eaten to console yourself after a disappointing event? Ever find yourself at the bottom of a bag of chips, or carton of ice cream wondering, “How did that happen?”

Whether you are overweight or at your ideal weight, chances are you’ve eaten at a time you weren’t even hungry. How does one combat mindless eating? With a therapeutic technique called “mindful eating.”

Being aware of what we eat, how much we eat, why we eat, and when we are eating can be the key to achieving or maintaining a healthy weight. People eat for many reasons beside actual hunger. Being angry, frustrated or stressed, feeling lonely, anxious, bored or tired are triggers that send people to the fridge looking for something to soothe them.

Here are some tips to help you apply the techniques of Mindfulness Therapy to your eating habits.

Food journal

Consider keeping a food journal. In addition to tracking the actual foods you consume, keep track of the following: your mood, your level of hunger on a scale from 1-10, what food(s) you are actually craving, and if any specific event preceded your desire to eat. Keeping and analyzing a record of the reasons you are eating, what is pushing you toward food, and how your emotions influence your food choices can be the beginning of creating a healthier relationship with food.

Think it over

If you are about to eat for any reason



Photo courtesy of Erin Wiley

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beside hunger (boredom, or emotional distress), walk away from the snacks and think about it. Get to the bottom of why food feels like a good solution to you in this moment.

Then choose a new coping mechanism for your distress or boredom: try meditation or a relaxation exercise. Maybe call a friend to talk out your feelings, draw, or write about what’s driving you to eat. Take a walk, play with a pet, or do a simple household chore. Tuning

into the thoughts and feelings that are leading you to the kitchen, and making a healthier choice strengthens your ability to listen to your body.

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Savor the flavor

Truly savor your experiences with food. Shut off the TV, put down your phone, put away the newspaper. When you are about to eat, take your time to sit down, slow down and start with a slow breath. Notice the way your food looks on the plate — the colors, the presentation — and then take time to enjoy the aroma. When you take the first bite, pay attention to how the food tastes, it’s texture and temperature.

Chew your food slowly and deliberately, pausing in between bites. Put your fork or spoon down in between bites of food. Occasionally check in with yourself to monitor your hunger cues: are you starting to feel full yet? Pay attention to the signals your body is sending you, and honor them.

Mindfulness is about living in the moment, and moving through life with a purpose behind each action. Mindful living is about slowing down and paying attention to what you are doing when you are doing it. It’s the antithesis of multi-tasking. By applying the concepts of mindfulness to our everyday eating, we stand a much better chance at not only staying a healthy weight, but also enjoying our food more intensely and digesting it better too.

So, take a slow, deep breath and “bon appetit!”