

Eating Mindfully, Not Mindlessly

What does it mean to eat mindlessly?

Eating mindlessly happens when one is not paying attention to how hungry they are, how much they're eating, or why they're eating. This usually leads to overeating or eating foods that are less healthy than the foods they would pick if they were paying attention.

Mindless eating can happen when you're distracted by something else, such as TV, other technology, driving, or dinner companions.



Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the act of focusing on the present moment and accepting the bodily sensations, thoughts, and feelings experienced in that moment. Mindfulness can be applied to many aspects of life, and can help bring relaxation, focus, or clarity to a task at hand.

Mindful eating

Mindfulness applied to eating is called "mindful eating." It occurs when one uses all of their senses to appreciate the food they are eating and pays attention to their hunger cues. Mindful eating can help make food more enjoyable while also enhancing awareness of satiety cues. This in turn can help with weight management.

What can you do to prevent mindless eating?

- Avoid distracted eating.
- Don't graze.
- Make sure that indulgences are infrequent—have a plan to eat healthy at restaurants or celebrations when you might otherwise be tempted to overeat.

- Choose plates, bowls, and cups that hold smaller amounts of food (e.g., try a 9- or 10-inch dinner plate instead of a 12-inch plate.).
- Eat slowly and chew thoroughly.
- Note whether you have physical hunger versus emotional "hunger."
- Find alternatives to eating to cope with emotions.

Practice Mindful Eating

- Eat all meals at a designated place, such as a table, while sitting down and relaxing.
- Avoid distractions—don't try to do or watch other things while eating.
- Take deep breaths and avoid judgment of yourself and your reaction to food when you eat.
- Take small bites and chew slowly and thoroughly.
- As you eat, frequently check in with your body and notice feelings of hunger or fullness and use these as a guide for when to stop eating.
- Use all of your senses while eating.



Mindful Eating Exercise

Try the following mindful eating exercise with a raisin or piece of chocolate.



LOOK: Look at your food, letting your eyes explore and take in the colors and textures of the food. Imagine you are from another planet and this is the first time you've ever seen the food.



TOUCH: Hold a piece of food in your hand. Move it around, exploring how it feels in your hand.



SMELL: Close your eyes and hold the food under your nose and inhale. Note the different aromas. Does your mouth water? Is your stomach preparing to eat?



TASTE: Place the food in your mouth, but don't swallow it yet. Notice how your hand knew just how to get to your mouth. Notice what happens to the food as you salivate. Move the food around in your mouth without chewing and note the flavors that are released. Try to stay focused. If other thoughts come to mind, note them without judgment and then return your thoughts to the exercise.



LISTEN: Finally, begin to chew and note the sound the food makes as you chew. Also pay attention to how the flavors of the food change. Note your desire to swallow the food. Go ahead and swallow, noting the sounds you hear and the feelings experienced as the food leaves your mouth and travels to your stomach.