



Nutrition Nibbles

Mindful Munching To Eat or Not To Eat...Mindfully

Allowing Exercise to be Enjoyable

Do you eat on autopilot the majority of the time? Or do you spend extraordinary amounts of time thinking of and obsessing about food? Mindfulness is a skill that can bring you back in sync with food, eating and your body, making the act of eating a pleasurable, comfortable one.

Mindfulness as defined by Donald Altman, MA, is 1) Awareness and paying attention to the physical body, sensations, emotions, perceptions, opinions, and thoughts as they are occurring—instant-to-instant. 2) Observing moment-to-moment experiences in a non-judgmental and non-blaming way. 3) Being fully conscious, intentional, and aware of your choices. 4) Getting involved in the process of things rather than focusing on the outcome, and 5) A state of being open, not closed, to other points of view.

Let's relate a few of the key points of mindfulness to eating. First, there is the idea of being in the present, instant-to-instant, and moment-to-moment. How often do you replay in your mind eating experiences

that happened in the past, like that whole box of Oreos you consumed last night while studying? How much of your day do you spend thinking about what you will make for dinner? In our time-pressed, multi-tasking society, little time is spent on what we are choosing, tasting, sensing, smelling, touching, thinking or feeling just in this moment. Next time you sit down to a meal or snack, try to do just that: sit down distraction-free and smell, taste, and touch your food...really experience it.

Secondly, mindful eating involves observing your eating and food choices in a non-judgmental way. Letting go of your beliefs about "good" and "bad" foods, acknowledging your level of hunger before/after eating, and noting your feelings around particular foods and mealtime can be tough to do but is well worth the effort. Remember to be without judgment—note your observations with little emotion. Think of this as collecting interesting data about yourself. Try this: pick one meal today and before starting, rate your hunger

I'm currently in the process of reading *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat*, a book on mindful eating by Michelle May (see resource section). This book includes a chapter on exercise, entitled "Born to Move." Some might ask: "Why does a book on mindful eating discuss exercise?" I believe the same principles of attention and intention that we apply to our eating can also be applied to moving our body.

How many people can honestly say that they enjoy exercise? Most of us exercise because we feel we "should," "the doctor told us to," or we believe we need to burn off as many calories as we eat. Rather than pleasurable, physical activity becomes punishment for the sins of our "bad" eating choices.

Stop! It's time for a mind switch. Quit dreading exercise and start thinking of the ways that physical activity enhances your life. I love this quote from the book: *"I deserve all the amazing benefits I get from being physically active."* You do not get to reap the rewards of exercise only after you reach a certain

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on a level of 1-10, with 1 being ravenous and 10 being stuffed. Don't try to explain or rationalize your level of hunger, just note it. Repeat this exercise after you have completed your meal. Don't take pride or place blame in your answers. Instead, use this data in a positive way to aid a future eating experience.

Third, be intentional in your food choices. Often I hear people say, they had no choice as to what to eat. You always have a choice in eating, even if it is to choose not to eat something because you don't like it or don't need it at that time. Be intentional—ask yourself what your body needs in this moment (quick energy, a chance to savor flavors, or time to connect with others over a meal), honor your taste preferences and your hunger by choosing tasty and satisfying amounts. Intentionally choose to eat (or not) something that meets your needs, taste, and hunger.

Fourth, mindful eating is process-based, not outcome-based. It is something you practice over and over; it is not something you “get” and never have to expend any further effort on. Each mindful eating experience teaches you something new—enjoy the journey!

Lastly, mindful eating involves being open to new ways of eating, thinking, and feeling about food. Mindful eating opens you up to self-discovery and the full spectrum of enjoyment that nourishing your body can offer.

Mindful Eating Resources

Eating Mindfully: How to End Mindless Eating & Enjoy A Balanced Relationship with Food, 2nd ed., by Susan Albers, Psy.D.

Meal by Meal: 365 Daily Meditations for Finding Balance through Mindful Eating by Donald Altman

Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat: How to Break Your Eat-Repent-Repeat Cycle by Michelle May, MD

Intuitive Eating by Evelyn Tribole, MS, RD and Elyse Resch, MS, RD, FADA

The Center for Mindful Eating: www.thecenterformindfuleating.org/

Am I Hungry?
amihungry.com/mindful-eating.shtml

Enjoyment continued...

weight or have exercised for a particular number of minutes. The lift in your mood, the pep in your step, and the countless other benefits are yours for the taking, each and every time you choose to move your body.

Change the way you think about exercise and likely, you will find yourself being more active, maybe even looking forward to the times you move your body. Find something(s) you like to do and make a point of “treating” yourself to that fun physical activity. After all, you never regret having exercised once you are done!

If you're having a hard time getting started, ask yourself, “What is the least amount of physical activity I could do consistently?” and start there.

--Michelle May, MD



“Mindful eating is a way to become reacquainted with the guidance of our internal nutritionist.”

~Jan Chozen Bays, MD