

# Mindful and Intuitive Eating

## Eating Mindfully

In the Western world, we don't pay a great deal of attention to the food we eat. We tend to think of food as not much more than a necessary factor of survival. What's worse, we tend to believe that this factor is as much a given as the air we breathe. We take our food for granted.

When you are hungry or searching for food, consider what your body actually desires versus grabbing the first thing that looks appealing or settling for what's fast to avoid preparing something nourishing. Note that often this search is not for dietary nourishment, but for soul nourishment. Really begin to consider the best way to satiate this craving.

## An Exercise on Mindful Eating:

To start, move through your meal slowly. Take your time performing every action and notice what your experience is as you go through it. When you lift your fork or cut something with your knife, note what is going through your mind. As you place a bite of food in your mouth and chew it, think about the flavor and texture of the food. Is it enjoyable? Or is it not to your liking? Don't get caught up in making judgment. Just notice it.

Do you find that particular thought or feelings come up during the course of the meal? If so, mentally note these feelings.

Are you eating with a friend or family member? Are you eating alone? It may be interesting to watch your mind as you interact with those around you. Because we all have to take the time to eat in order to live, eating mindfully is an excellent way to keep us in touch with the present moment.



## 5 Steps To Intuitive Eating:

1.) Learn your hunger signals.

- How do you know when you are hungry? How do you know when you are satisfied? Full? Stuffed? Famished?
- Imagine a hunger meter from 0-10. 0 = very painful hunger, 5 = neutral, 10 = very painful fullness.
- Ask yourself the following questions:
  - Where is your hunger level usually at before you eat? After you eat?
  - How do you know that you are finished eating your meal? How do you feel at your last bite?
  - At what level do you feel most comfortable?
- As much as possible, it is best to eat when you are at a hunger level of 3 or 4, and to stop eating at a 5 or a 6. If you wait until you are at a 1 or 2, then there will be a tendency to overeat and end up feeling uncomfortable at a 7 or 8. Do you see how the pendulum swings?

2.) Pay attention to how your body feels before and after your eating experience.

- Before: Do a check-in before eating. Are you truly physically hungry? If not, what might be some other non-food ways that you can nourish yourself emotionally (call a friend, read a good book, go for a walk)? If you would like to eat anyway or are physically hungry, then how much food do you think you need? What kind of food are you hungry for? What signals is your body giving you? Picture how you will feel after eating a particular food. Will you feel more energetic, fulfilled and ready to go? Or will you feel tired and weighed down?
- After: After eating, ask yourself how you feel. If you feel well nourished and energetic, remember the kinds of foods that allowed you to feel this way. If you feel sluggish or have digestive pains, then be present in your feelings (rather than distracting yourself from them) so as to remember the kinds of foods that made you feel this way. Next time, you may not feel so compelled to eat them.

3.) Eat foods that you find tasty and satisfying.

- If you eat foods you truly do not like, then you will not feel satisfied. Keep in mind that our tastebuds are not fixed and will change/adjust over time. When you are not

satisfied, you will eat more.

- When you eat foods that are satisfying to your body and taste delicious, then you will feel deeply nourished and will need less of them to satisfy your hunger (unless you feel guilty about eating them....see #4). This is why it is important to eat fat. Fat allows the body to feel satiated on the physical level.
  - Slow release carbohydrates (whole grains, yams, squashes) and protein foods keep you feeling satisfied for longer after a meal. This is why when you eat, for example, a cinnamon bun for breakfast you will feel hungry very soon after.
- 4.) Feel pleasure from eating – be present while you eat and taste every bite.
- • Food is a wonderful source of pleasure. In our society, we are often taught to feel guilty for eating. We are given a list of “good” and “bad” foods. We tend to praise those who practice admirable self-control by staying on a diet. And we often look down on those who do not. We have learned to rush through the eating process at our desks, in our cars or in front of the television. These beliefs and habits have taken the enjoyment out of eating. Because we don’t enjoy food enough, we tend to overeat to gain a feeling of satisfaction from it. If we took time to revel in the pleasure of eating, then we would feel satiated from a lesser amount of food.
  - While you eat, pay attention. Chew each bite while noticing the combination of subtle flavors. See above for a mindful eating exercise.
  - Remember a love and respect for yourself means taking care of your respect for yourself means taking care of your body. Imagine the food you are eating being absorbed into your body and nourishing allows you to function optimally both physically and mentally.
- 5.) Throw out “their” rules and write your own story.
- • Know that you are the expert of your own body and it is only you who can
  - determine the diet that is best for your health. Note the foods that make you feel good. And the ones that don’t. On a regular basis, eat the foods that make you feel energetic, clear-headed and satisfied. Sometimes you will use food for emotional nourishment and that is okay. Just make sure you are conscious that you are using it for just that reason, and are enjoying every bite without guilt.