

MINDFUL EATING

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MINDFUL EATING¹, also called intuitive eating², applies the concept of mindfulness to our eating behaviors³. Mindful eating refers to eating with presence, intention, and awareness⁴. While variably defined, mindful eating is “nonjudgmental awareness of physical and emotional sensations associated with eating.”⁵ In contrast to mindful eating, **mindless eating** is a lack of awareness of the food that we are consuming¹.

KEY POINTS

- I. **MINDFUL EATING IS ABOUT CREATING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS** with food.
- II. **MINDFUL EATING CALLS FOR US TO SLOW DOWN AND TO PAY ATTENTION** to what we are eating as well as how our body is responding.
- III. **MINDFUL EATING INFLUENCES WHAT AND HOW MUCH WE ARE EATING** so that our choices support human and planetary health.

IMPORTANCE OF MINDFUL EATING

There are many distractions in our fast-paced society where people may choose foods of convenience over freshly prepared meals or choose to eat their meals and snacks while driving, working, or viewing a screen. Promoting behavioral change to encourage healthy and sustainable choices is a complex and multifaceted issue. Mindfulness, and more specifically mindful eating, is one strategy that we can use to encourage behavioral choices that support healthy and sustainable food systems³. Ultimately, the goal of mindful eating is to foster a healthy relationship with food towards healthier eating habits⁶.

The prevalence of people who are overweight or obese and the related health concerns are among the most challenging public health burdens of our time, and are associated with numerous diet-related chronic diseases⁷. Mindful eating is associated with healthy weight management and improvements in eating behavior⁵. For example, mindful eating has been shown to support a reduction in impulse and binge eating as well as consumption of fewer calories⁶. In association

with mental and emotional challenges that often drive overeating or mindless eating, mindful eating is linked with decreased stress and depression, which support healthier food choices⁸. Importantly, mindful eating is associated with encouraging preferences for and improving our attitudes towards healthier foods⁶, which often includes foods that are more sustainable for people and the planet, such as fresh or local minimally processed foods.

The practice of mindful eating consists of making conscious and intentional food choices as well as developing an awareness of physical and emotional sensations about food, including hunger and body cues regarding the amount we have eaten¹. Mindful eating further consists of the sensory experience of eating, including

noting of the aromas, tastes, and textures of food. Applied to sustainability, mindful eating comprises an understanding of where and how our food was produced and a reflection on its sustainability attributes, including the environmental and social processes that enabled food to come to the table.



INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES TO ENHANCE MINDFUL EATING

1. **IN AN INSTITUTIONAL SETTING**, such as preschool or elementary school, scheduling recess before lunch is a mindful eating practice that is associated with increased consumption of healthful foods, greater focus on lunch, improved cafeteria behavior, and reduced plate waste¹.
2. **CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE CONDUCTIVE TO CONVERSATION AND CONNECTION** with limited distractions such as an inviting environment with comfortable lounge, booth, or home-style seating; removal of televisions; and the addition of relaxing music enhances mindful eating.
3. **OFFERING REDUCED DINNERWARE SIZES AND PORTIONS** based on guidance from dietary guidelines leads to increased mindful eating as well.
4. **INCLUDING SIGNAGE, SUCH AS IN A DINING HALL**, with information on benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption, or ingredient lists featuring local or seasonal foods may give the consumer time to reflect on where the food came from and how the food is nourishing their body.



CONSUMER PRACTICES FOR MINDFUL EATING

1. **MINDFUL EATING STARTS WITH PLANNING YOUR MEALS** ahead of time so you can make the most of your time and resources towards supporting healthy and sustainable food choices. Bring a shopping list when purchasing foods. Avoid impulse buying by eating before you go to the market.
2. **AT THE MARKET, REFLECT ON THE SUSTAINABILITY ATTRIBUTES** (health, environmental, cultural, economic) of every item you purchase.
3. **PREPARE YOUR OWN MEALS SO YOU CAN BUILD AWARENESS OF YOUR FOOD** and help improve your psychological relationship with food¹.
4. **SLOW DOWN BY SHARING FOOD AND SITTING DOWN TO EAT** with family, friends, and community. Appreciate the food, including its flavors and how it was produced. Pay attention to how you are feeling while you eat.
5. **EAT YOUR MEALS AT REGULAR INTERVALS** where you have an appetite but are not overly hungry so you can enjoy your food².
6. **START WITH A SMALL PORTION SIZE** that you serve in a plate or bowl. You can refill if still hungry.
7. **SHOW GRATITUDE TO THE FOOD** and all the natural resources and people involved in bringing the food to your table. Before you eat, observe the food and reflect on how it was produced and prepared. Deep belly breaths can help make you present and bring awareness to your meal.
8. **USE YOUR SENSES TO SAVOR THE FLAVORS OF THE FOOD** while you are eating and avoid distractions such as watching TV, working, or using other electronics.
9. **TAKE SMALL BITES, EAT SLOWLY, AND TAKE PAUSES** while you are eating in order to allow your body to provide signals when you are full¹.



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