“What does it mean to eat mindfully?”

Slow down, be present and really taste your food, perhaps for the first time.

Have you ever sat down to a meal or snack and it’s gone before you even realize it? Soon dissatisfaction and disappointment set in because you’re feeling unfulfilled and want to eat more. Mindful eating gives you permission to make eating a priority in your day. After all, eating is necessary to maintain an energized and healthy body. Begin to feel satisfied in your body and your mind by practicing these mindful eating techniques.

1. Eat sitting down at a table without distractions. Move away from your desk, kitchen counter, couch or bed. Turn off the TV or computer. Close any books. Be open to the simple task of eating.
2. Fill your plate with a variety of nutrient-rich foods that will satisfy your hunger, but not leave you feeling stuffed. Season your food with spices rather than adding unhealthy fats.
3. Take a few moments before you eat to observe your food. Notice the colors, textures and smells. Consider where it came from, how it was prepared and who prepared it for you.
4. Say a few words to yourself about how grateful you are for the food.
5. Take a couple deep breaths, then take your first bite. Smell, taste and notice the texture of your food as you slowly chew. Swallow only after your food has been chewed thoroughly. The digestion process begins in the mouth with saliva breaking down your food.
6. Set down your food or your fork between each bite. Consider pausing for a moment before reaching for your next bite, noticing your mind, body, feelings and thoughts without needing to change them.
7. If thoughts take you away from the present moment, gently guide yourself back to the experience of eating and all that surrounds you on a moment-to-moment basis.
8. Embrace the interconnectedness of earth and all living things around you.

More tips for eating mindfully

- Notice your level of physical hunger before reaching for food. Only eat when you are hungry. Avoid eating when you’re stressed, sad or feeling negative emotions. In these moments, try to distract yourself in other ways rather than reaching for food.
- Use your non-dominant hand or use chopsticks to feed yourself. This will force you to slow down.
- Be mindful when serving up your food and portion out the food you serve yourself.
- Chew each bite a specific number of times before you swallow. Counting each time you chew will keep you in the moment and help you slow down.
- Close your eyes as you eat to remove any distractions from the sense of sight.

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- Try to identify all ingredients and spices in your food.
- There's no need to eat each meal mindfully, but designate certain meals or snacks as your mindful meals.
- It takes 20 minutes for the brain to tell your stomach that you're full. Eating slowly and pausing between each bite will give your brain time to signal your stomach that it's full, thus resulting in eating fewer calories.

Benefits of eating mindfully

- May reduce overeating and eating when you're not hungry.
- May lead to weight loss since you're only eating when you're hungry.
- May lead to increased mindfulness in other aspects of your life.
- May cause you to be more attuned into mind, body, feelings and thoughts.
- May allow you to slow down and feel more satisfied with your food.
- May give you a sense of gratitude for your food.

Examples of mindful eating

- When eating a clementine, peel it slowly and separate each section before eating. Count the number of sections, smell them, feel the oils from the peel on your fingers, then slowly eat the sections.
- Take a piece of chocolate, peel open the wrapper, observe the chocolate, smell it then place it in your mouth. Let it slowly melt in your mouth. Notice the smooth texture, the flavor and the satisfaction of taking your time to enjoy the chocolate.
- Choose one of your favorite foods and eat it as though it's the first time you've ever tried it. What would this experience be like? Take your time, using all of your senses to experience this food. See it, touch it, smell it, hear the sounds it makes and finally taste it.

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