



Mindfulness and Mindful Eating

You've heard the word a million times over the past few years: mindfulness. Be mindful, live mindfully, eat mindfully...

Well, what does mindfulness mean? When one has questions about the meaning of something, we turn, of course, to Wikipedia! And Wikipedia summarily notes that Mindfulness is "the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment." In other words, being mindful means being present. Focusing on what is going on right now. Paying attention to what you are thinking, how you are feeling, and what you are experiencing in the moment.

So, right this second, wherever you're at. What are you aware of around you? Are you warm? Cold or, just right? Is your chair too hard, too soft, or, just right? It sounds like reading the Three Bears! What's on your mind? What are you thinking about? Are you focusing on what you are listening to and watching? Or is your mind wandering. Are you aware of how you are feeling? Happy? Relaxed? Scared? Anxious?

An important aspect of mindfulness is not to judge. Just be aware. So, if you realize you are feeling anxious, don't start talking negatively to yourself about it. Just be aware of it. No criticizing or chastising yourself in regard to how you feel. Here's where the saying, "it is what it is" applies. Simply be aware of your current moment, and be in the current moment, like you're an observer.

Think of yourself as a reporter looking at yourself in the present moment. The commentary might go something like this: "There sits Sally. She looks comfortable, sitting relaxed in her recliner, legs crossed, leaning slightly forward toward the screen she's watching. She appears content with the temperature of the room, wearing short sleeves and seeming neither warm nor cool. The thought bubble above her head indicates she is actively participating in the commentary she's listening to. Her thought, as a broadcast in the imaginary thought bubble says, "this is very interesting information." She feels calm, relaxed, and curious. She is present. She is aware.

You get the idea! Mindfulness is simply living in the present and paying attention to what is. What difference does this make when it comes to eating, losing weight, and maintaining a healthy weight?

Next, are two different mindfulness situations specifically related to eating.



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Cynthia sits down on the couch to watch her favorite show. She turns on the television, and the program has just started. She runs to grab her lunch, so she can multitask before she has to rush out the door back to work.

She turns up the volume on the TV so she won't miss a thing while she quickly runs into the kitchen, opens the cupboards and fridge, grabs what she can find in a hurry, and rushes back to the couch to catch the show. Thirty minutes later, as the show ends, leaving her frustrated not knowing if the couple is going to get back together for the 135th time or not, she shoves the remaining chips in her fingers into her mouth, crumples up the bag, and notices she's eaten the entire family-size bag. "Oh, well. I may as well throw it into the trash then," she muses, giving a moment's pause, pondering if the bag was full when she brought it into the living room. She throws away her yogurt container, wraps up the little bit of cheese that remains on the block, realizing that there is not a single cracker left in the sleeve. "Hmm..." she thinks. "No wonder I'm so full!" On the way back to work she starts thinking about her lunch. "I can't believe I polished off that entire sleeve of crackers and most of that block of cheese, not to mention all those chips. I just meant to eat my yogurt and have a few bites of cheese with crackers. I'm not going to meet my goals for healthy eating this way!" She returns to work feeling sluggish and upset with herself, and her work reflects how she feels.

The next day, Cynthia again comes home for lunch. That morning, she read an article about Mindful Eating and decided to put into practice the tips she read. She carefully chose what she would eat: a single serving of low-fat Greek yogurt, half a cup (which she measured) of fresh raspberries, a slice of turkey, and one slice of cheese. She put her food on a plate, noting the variety of colors and textures of food. She felt grateful for making the choices she had. She sat down, considering watching her show, but reminding herself she was recording it so it would be available later. She took her time eating her food, making sure to put down her spoon between bites. She chewed carefully and slowly, noting the flavors of the foods as she put them in her mouth. She took small bites of food. She considered how fortunate she was to be able to have so many food options. Knowing how much she loves sugar, Cynthia opted to save most of the raspberries for last. She thought about how much more enjoyable her food was when she focused on tasting it. She felt proud of herself for making choices that aligned with her goals of ongoing health. She was pleased with the selection of foods she chose and impressed that she had gotten in quite a bit of protein as well as a variety of vitamins and nutrients. She drove back to work feeling emotionally peaceful and physically satisfied.



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A few benefits related to mindful eating:

1. Choosing what you will eat helps you prevent overeating. Cynthia chose a variety of foods, measuring her portions and making sure she was eating a balanced meal.
2. Mindful eating can improve your health. Cynthia refrained from eating unhealthy potato chips and overeating crackers and cheese, as she had the day before.
3. Weight loss and weight maintenance are assisted when one eats mindfully because food selections, portion sizes, and satiation are all attended to.
4. You can actually improve your health with mindful eating. Chewing food better leads to fuller absorption of nutrients into the body!
5. Food is more enjoyable when you pay attention to what you're eating. Tasting and enjoying food by paying attention to the flavors and textures leads to a more satisfying experience when eating.
6. One of the most important aspects of mindful eating is the positive way you feel about yourself when you do make healthy food choices, eat mindfully, and enjoy your food!
 - a. This is one of the most important aspects of mindful eating is because of the ripple effects it has. When you feel positive about yourself, pleased because you made good choices, put healthy food into your body, and enjoyed it, you develop all sorts of good "selfies."
 - i. Self-efficacy, meaning you know you can make good food choices because you just did,
 - ii. Self-confidence, knowing you know can feel satisfied eating foods that provide your body with the healthy vitamins and nutrients it needs,
 - iii. Self-esteem, meaning you feel proud of yourself
 - iv. Self-nurture, demonstrating you know you can take the time to care for yourself,
 - v. Self-worth, recognizing you are important enough to eat well,
 - vi. Positive self-talk, thanking yourself for the great self-care!
 - b. When you treat yourself well, think kind thoughts about yourself, and feel positive, you are assured that other relationships in your life will be improved as well. Why? When we're upbeat because we feel good about ourselves, we are more pleasant to be around, and we treat others more pleasantly! A win-win for sure!

There's not really all that much to eating mindfully; the hard part is doing it. Isn't that the case with a lot of things related to weight loss and keeping weight off? You know so much about how to lose weight. And you also know how to keep it off!



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They say knowledge is power, however, knowledge is nothing more than knowledge unless you do something with it! Knowledge is essential to make changes. It's awareness. Knowledge is awareness of things you need to know. Once you have the knowledge and put it into action, you are very powerful! You own your journey. You feel a sense of personal power in relation to your weight loss and weight maintenance. Doing is what makes knowledge powerful.

They also say when you know better you do better, however, some may not agree. You know why? Because you know a whole bunch about how to lose weight and you also know how to keep the weight off. (you keep the weight off by continuing to do the things that led to weight loss in the first place, one of which is to eat mindfully.) You know better, but are you doing better? Knowing better doesn't lead to doing better. Doing better leads to doing better.

The bottom line in weight loss lies in the doing of those things we know we're supposed to do. You have the tools. If you're struggling with the doing, then involve mentors you need: hire a trainer, start a walking group, schedule appointments with a nutritionist, a psychologist, or a sponsor. Get whatever help you need to assist you in not only eating mindfully, but in engaging mindfully and fully in your life!



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