

Savor the Flavor of Eating Right National Nutrition Month® 2016

March has been designated as National Nutrition Month® by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The theme this year is “Savor the Flavor of Eating Right.” This theme encourages everyone to take time to enjoy food traditions and appreciate the pleasures, flavors and social experiences food adds to our lives. This newsletter will explore mindful eating, which involves being aware of all aspects of the eating process.



Following a healthful eating plan includes learning about what foods to choose and those to limit. In addition to adjusting *what* you eat to manage good health, it may be just as helpful to manage *how* you eat. Mindful eating is not a diet, but a practice of experiencing food with more focus and appreciation. The concept has roots in Buddhist teachings, which focuses on quieting the mind, slowing down, bringing your attention to a calm place, and eating thoughtfully. Studies have found that mindful eating can help individuals reduce overeating, lose weight, cope with chronic eating disorders and improve symptoms of Type 2 diabetes.

In today's fast-paced lifestyle, meal and snack times are often full of distractions such as eating while watching

television, talking on the phone, working, driving, or participating in social media. It is rare that we are simply *eating* when we are eating. In fact, 66% of Americans report regularly eating in front of the television. Mindless eating habits can influence both what and how much we eat. Everyone has moments of mindless eating, such as eating a whole bag of popcorn while watching a movie, automatically grabbing a handful of candy out of the dish at work each time you pass by, or eating everything on your plate before realizing you are uncomfortably full. Eating this way on occasion doesn't usually lead to poor health, but doing so too often can lead to chronic overeating, weight gain, and other health problems.

With a practice of eating more slowly and paying closer attention to what and how you are eating, you may become more aware that you don't need to eat as much. Additionally, increasing your awareness of your current eating patterns can help you identify habits you can change. Over time, small changes in the way you prepare, serve and eat your meals can lead to big improvements in your eating habits and your health.

Putting It Into Practice

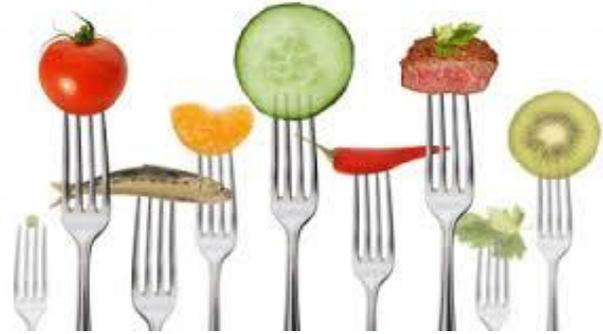
Developing a mindful eating practice is a journey that you can work towards over time. Experts suggest starting gradually with mindful eating – eating one meal a day or week in a slower and more attentive manner. Mindful eating can be practiced anywhere and at any time. The following exercises are not to suggest eating all of your meals this carefully, but by practicing mindful eating, you may uncover some things about your own eating habits. Try the exercises on the next page and see what you discover!

Eat a Food Mindfully

- Take a raisin, berry, or a small piece of chocolate.
- Observe the appearance, texture, and aroma. Do you notice any changes in your body as you observe the food, such as increased flow of saliva or anticipation?
- Place the food in your mouth and wait 30-60 seconds before chewing.
- What do you notice about the flavor and texture before and after you start chewing?
- How does this experience compare to when you typically eat this food?

Eat a Meal Mindfully

- Eliminate distractions; turn off the TV, silence the phone
- Analyze your level of hunger and any emotions you carry with you. Ask yourself “Am I physically hungry?”, “How hungry am I?” and “Is there a specific food I’d like to have?”
- Set a timer to 20 minutes, and take that time to eat a normal-sized meal.
- Take a few deep breaths to help you focus on your food.
- Turn your attention to what you see on your plate, as well as the aromas you smell. Ask yourself “Is this the food I really want?”
- Try eating with your non-dominant hand; if you are right-handed, hold your fork in your left hand. You may also try using chopsticks if you don’t normally use them.
- Observe the movement of your hand in picking up a utensil and bringing food to your mouth.
- Take small bites and chew well.
- Pay attention to the flavors and textures, like the freshness of the bread, the tanginess of the lemon or the crunchiness of the vegetables.
- Notice how the taste and texture of the food changes as you chew and swallow each bite.
- Eat silently for five minutes, thinking about what it took to produce the meal, from the sun, to the farmer, to the grocer, to the cook.
- About halfway through the meal, check in and assess your hunger and increase in fullness. Ask yourself, “Am I satisfied?” and “Do I need to keep eating?”



Mindful practices like these can shift your attention from your environment and thoughts to the present moment and the food you are eating. It may also make you more aware of your hunger level. If you are used to eating quickly or being distracted by other activities, eating mindfully may seem awkward at first. You may notice your mind drifting off the experience of eating, but don't judge yourself and simply return to the awareness of that bite of food. As you continue to practice mindful eating and establish it as a habit, you will feel more comfortable doing it.

Bottom Line

Eating mindfully is eating with awareness of the total experience of eating. It is being present in the moment, for every sensation that happens, such as chewing, tasting and swallowing. Mindful eating can help to promote healthful eating habits, prevent overeating and in turn lead to overall good health. Developing a mindful eating practice takes time. Be patient, see what you discover about your own eating habits, and “Savor the Flavor of Eating Right”!

To learn more about National Nutrition Month visit:

- www.eatright.org

To learn more about mindful eating visit and read:

- The Center for Mindful Eating : www.tcme.org
- Am I Hungry : www.amihungry.com
- Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat
By Michelle May, MD
- Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think
By Brian Wansink, PhD

Need a Dietitian?

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition questions. To make an appointment call 412.692.4497 (Oakland location) or 412.623.2421 (Shadyside location).