



**A
L
A
S
K
A

P
R
E
M
I
E
R

H
E
A
L
T
H**

Mindful eating

Does this Sound Familiar?

It's 8 am and you're dashing out the door for a meeting. It's too late to eat breakfast so you stop at the coffee shop and grab a mocha and a muffin, eating in the car on the way. Your morning is crazy and before you know it, it's 1:45 pm. Your next appointment is arriving at 2:00 pm so you fish out a package of pretzels from your desk drawer and grab a soda from the break room, hurriedly munching and sipping your "lunch." On your way home and two errands later, you stop to get gas and since you're also "running on empty" you pop into the station and pick up a snack.

Although it may seem exaggerated, it's not unusual to breeze through a day eating and drinking with almost no recollection of what or how much we consumed. Our lives are so busy that we become "opportunistic" eaters, grabbing whatever seems easiest without much planning or intention.

The goal of this module is to gain insight into the practice of mindfulness and how it can help you change the way that you eat. Many people who have struggled with their weight or who are chronic dieters have become disconnected from their internal signals of hunger and satiety. Learning to eat mindfully and paying attention to your unique body signals and the complete experience of eating is a powerful tool for changing your relationship with food. Studies have shown that mindfulness training can help individuals self-regulate eating behavior, lose weight, maintain weight loss, improve anxiety and depression, and reduce both the rate of bingeing, and the amount of food eaten during binges.¹²

Below are The Principles of Mindful Eating as developed by the Center for Mindful Eating.³

tools for success

- Understand the principles of mindful eating and how it can help you change the way you eat.
- Use the principles of mindfulness to increase awareness of your feelings and thoughts during meal planning, food preparation, and eating.
- Learn the hunger and satiety scale and use it to help you gauge when you are ready to stop eating.

www.OPTIFAST.com

Principles of Mindful Eating

Principles of Mindfulness:

- Mindfulness is deliberately paying attention, non-judgmentally.
- Mindfulness encompasses both internal processes and external environments.
- Mindfulness is being aware of what is present for you mentally, emotionally and physically in each moment.
- With practice, mindfulness cultivates the possibility of freeing yourself of reactive, habitual patterns of thinking, feeling and acting.
- Mindfulness promotes balance, choice, wisdom and acceptance of what is.

Mindful Eating is:

- Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food preparation and consumption by respecting your own inner wisdom.
- Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body by using all your senses to explore, savor and taste.
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, neutral or dislikes) without judgment.
- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating.

Someone Who Eats Mindfully:

- Acknowledges that there is no right or wrong way to eat but varying degrees of awareness surrounding the experience of food.
- Accepts that his/her eating experiences are unique.
- Is an individual who by choice, directs his/her awareness to all aspects of food and eating on a moment-by-moment basis.
- Is an individual who looks at the immediate choices and direct experiences associated with food and eating: not to the distant health outcome of that choice.

- Is aware of and reflects on the effects caused by unmindful eating.
- Experiences insight about how he/she can act to achieve specific health goals as he/she becomes more attuned to the direct experience of eating and feelings of health.
- Becomes aware of the interconnection of earth, living beings, and cultural practices and the impact his/ her food choices has on those systems.

How Do You Begin?

Mindfulness begins with paying attention to your reactions during the stages of meal planning, food preparation, and eating. The intention is to observe your behavior like a “third party” with no judgment or criticism. It is simply to increase your awareness of your thoughts and feelings so that you can begin to understand how they affect your relationship with food. That relationship is multi-dimensional, shaped by your family and friends, religious and cultural heritage, society’s norms and expectations, and marketing efforts of the food industry. By increasing awareness of your thoughts and views about food, you can make a decision to put aside past events and future hopes and focus on what is happening in the present moment.

Instead of being influenced by outside factors, listening to your body’s internal cues of hunger, satiety, and satisfaction can help you decide when, what and how much you want to eat.

Meal Planning

In several of our LES modules we’ve discussed the importance of meal planning for long-term success in managing weight. Many people who have had difficulty maintaining a healthy weight say one of their biggest challenges is finding time to plan and shop. But let’s explore this from another angle.

As your week comes to a close, and it’s time to plan for the coming week, how are you feeling about the decisions you need to make? What thoughts and emotions come to you?

- Are you excited about looking for new recipes to try?
- Are you bored with your usual meals but too tired to search for other ideas?
- Are you looking forward to going to the farmer's market to see what's in season?
- Are you resentful that other family members don't help and it's all on your shoulders?
- Do you love to go grocery shopping?
- Do you hate to go grocery shopping?
- Do you hate getting up early enough to prepare and eat breakfast or make a lunch to bring to work?
- Is it physically challenging for you to get out to shop?
- Are you concerned about having enough money to buy healthy foods?
- Do you find it rewarding to sit down and plan what you will have for dinner this week?
- Do you tend to eat whatever is "easiest" without doing much planning?

Food Preparation

When it comes to preparing meals, there's a wide range of feelings about this! Our lives are so busy, it can be difficult to find the time to cook, especially if we haven't done much planning. Perhaps you never learned to cook, so the task seems daunting. As you sit quietly and think about what it involves to make healthy food for yourself, what comes to mind?

- Do you find cooking relaxing and enjoyable?
- Do you dislike cooking?
- Do you find it discouraging to cook for just yourself?
- Do you come home from work exhausted and dread having to cook another meal?
- When you were growing up, did you have to cook for other family members? Was that a burden or did you enjoy it?
- Do you have the kitchen skills needed to cook for yourself or your family?
- Do you like the layout and feel of your kitchen?

- Is your kitchen cramped and hard to work in?
- Do you have a good set of knives and cookware?
- Are you aware of tension in your body just thinking about having to prepare food?
- Are you worried about "tasting" and "food sampling" while you're cooking?
- Do you have family members who complain about what you're preparing when they come into the kitchen?

Eating

In our harried world where we're rushing from one activity to the next, the joy and pleasure of eating is often lost. We may just be grabbing a quick meal because we're vaguely aware that we're hungry or the clock is telling us it's time to eat. When you think about your usual eating experiences, what comes to mind?

- Do you categorize foods as good or bad?
- Do you feel guilty when you eat "bad" foods?
- Do you think about and talk about food frequently?
- Do you usually eat based on the clock?
- Do you usually eat more when you eat alone?
- Do you usually eat less when you eat alone?
- Do you usually eat more when you eat with others?
- Do you usually eat less when you eat with others?
- Do you rarely experience hunger?
- Do you wait to eat until you are ravenous?
- Do you eat very rapidly and are you often the first person done at the table?
- Do you take time to enjoy the beauty and bounty of your food before you eat?
- Do you eat slowly and savor your food?
- Do you usually eat just the right amount of food?
- Do you often eat until you feel stuffed?
- Do you have intense food cravings for certain foods?
- Are you a picky eater?
- Do you like just about all foods?
- Do you eat in response to stress or when you're bored?
- Do you lose your appetite when you're stressed out or upset?

Of course there are no right or wrong answers to these questions; they simply are your thoughts and feelings that affect how you approach each experience. By sitting quietly in the moment with awareness about your thoughts, you can decide if some of those thoughts can be discarded as “old news” and no longer applicable to your current desire to live a healthy lifestyle.

Physical vs. Emotional Hunger

Part of eating mindfully is becoming aware of what triggers your hunger. Hunger is your body’s signal that it needs nutrition to keep going. Of course, sometimes we eat for reasons that have nothing to do with our physiological needs. The next time you are thinking about food and getting ready to eat, stop and listen to your body and your mind.

- Are you getting signals of physiological hunger (stomach feels empty or it’s “grumbling,” irritability or agitation, lack of concentration, faintness or light-headedness, nausea)?
- Has it been 3-5 hours since you last ate?

- Are you feeling anxious, bored, sad, lonely, depressed, or upset?
- Are you craving a certain food and only that food will “do?”

If you realize your desire to eat right now is unrelated to your physiological need for food, you have a choice to go ahead and eat or try a different behavior. You might choose to call a friend, go for a walk, jump on your treadmill, watch a movie, or get out your crafting supplies. If you choose to eat, you will be doing it with full intention instead of doing it mindlessly.

References

1. Kristeller J, Hallette C. An exploratory study of a meditation-based intervention for binge eating disorder. *J Health Psychology* 1999;4(3):357–63.
2. <http://www.balancedlivingpsychology.com/mindfuleating>
3. <http://www.tcme.org/principles.htm>
4. <http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/healthy-eating-recognizing-your-hunger-signals#>

key goals

Using the tips in this module, develop 2 – 3 goals to work towards.

1	
2	
3	

Exercises

Mindful Eating Exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to practice using all of your senses to gain a new appreciation of your eating experience.

- Sit in a quiet place without distractions.
- Place 4 raisins in the palm of your hand.
- Observe the differences in their sizes, wrinkled texture, shape, and color.
- Smell the raisins....can you detect an odor? Is it pleasant? Does it remind you of anything? Does it make you want to pop them in your mouth?
- Place two of the raisins in your mouth, close your eyes, and don't chew them! Can you feel their wrinkly texture with your tongue? Do you taste their sweetness yet? Is it difficult to do this part of the exercise without wanting to chew and swallow them?
- Keep them on your tongue until they slowly dissolve and melt in your mouth. Can you picture the grapes drying in the sun as they slowly turn into raisins? At what point do you get a burst of sweetness?
- When you're done eating those raisins, place the remaining two raisins in your mouth. Chew and then swallow them. What was the difference in the experience? Did you get as much enjoyment from chewing and swallowing them as you did savoring them slowly?

Record your observations from this exercise:

Eat Your Meals with Intention

Practice this same exercise while eating your daily meals. Turn off the TV, put away the newspapers and magazines, and give mealtime your complete attention. Eating with intention and being fully present in the moment allows you to make food decisions based on internal awareness, hunger, satiety cues, and your own wisdom.

- Before you begin eating, observe the beautiful colors, textures, and smells of your food. Think of where they came from and how they are about to enter your body and nourish you.
- Before you begin eating, rate your hunger level (see the Rating Your Hunger and Satiety exercise on page 6).
- As you eat, pay attention to the varieties of flavors...are they sweet, salty, bitter, sour, spicy?
- How long does it take you to chew the different foods on your plate? Are you eating some foods more quickly than others?
- Do you like the "combination foods" (like casseroles) or do you prefer the separate foods on your plate?
- Do you eat one food at a time? Are you saving some favorite foods until the end?
- What is the temperature of the food and how does that affect you? Do you prefer hot, lukewarm, or cold foods?
- Are you eating quickly or slowly?

- After 10 minutes of eating, rate your hunger/fullness again. If you're at 5, did you stop eating? Why or why not?
- Can you comfortably leave food on your plate or are you compelled to clean your plate?
- After the meal, rate your hunger again. What is your rating? If it was greater than a 5, what factors contributed to your decision to continue eating beyond being satisfied?

Rating Your Hunger and Satiety

You've probably heard that it takes about 20 minutes for your gut to signal your brain that you are full. One way to become familiar with your hunger and level of fullness or "satiety" is to pause and assess your hunger level before you take your first bite, about 10 minutes after you start eating, and at the end of the meal. You can use this hunger rating scale to help you assess your hunger:

- 1 Starving, weak, dizzy
- 2 Very hungry, cranky, low energy, lots of stomach growling
- 3 Pretty hungry, stomach is growling a little
- 4 Starting to feel a little hungry
- 5 Satisfied, neither hungry nor full
- 6 A little full, pleasantly full
- 7 A little uncomfortable
- 8 Feeling stuffed
- 9 Very uncomfortable, stomach hurts
- 10 So full you feel sick

It's helpful to record where, when, and with whom you are eating. You may notice that some situations or environments trigger different behaviors, prompting you to eat more (or less) food or causing you to ignore your body signals. The more you practice this technique, the better you will get at recognizing your signs of hunger and fullness. This can help you make the decision to eat before you get ravenous and stop eating when you are satisfied.

Hunger Rating

Where are you? _____

What time is it? _____

Who are you eating with (if applicable)? _____

Rating before I start eating: _____

Rating 10 minutes after I began eating: _____

Rating at the end of the meal: _____

Thoughts or feelings I experienced during this exercise:

OPTIFAST®

The serious solution for weight loss™

www.OPTIFAST.com • 800-662-2540 • Florham Park, NJ 07932 USA.
All trademarks are owned by Société des Produits Nestlé S.A., Vevey, Switzerland. ©2011 Nestlé HealthCare Nutrition, Inc. All rights reserved.

OPTI-11653-0811