

HEALTHFUL TIPS

HEALTH AND FITNESS TIPS FOR YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY

Mindful Eating

Tips for Breaking Mindless Eating Habits

Each of us has a lot of eating habits that we learned at an early age. Through the years, these habits have become so deeply ingrained that it can be difficult even to recognize them. Unconscious, automatic eating habits can have a negative impact on our weight and our health. If we can recognize these habits, we can learn to keep those that serve us well and discard those that do not.

Mindless eating may cause a disconnect between what we perceive to be hunger (nervousness, boredom, anger, sadness, thirst, food cues) and actual physical hunger. We seldom take the time to assess our initial urge to eat. Perhaps this is because food is usually very accessible. With very little effort, we can satisfy the urge to eat—it is the path of least resistance. So mindless eating often results in eating when there is no actual physical hunger.

When we do experience actual physical hunger, eating has become just another task that we squeeze in, quickly gulping our food to eliminate the sense of hunger so that we can move on to the next activity. Or we multi-task while eating; eating while watching TV, working on the computer or driving a car. Eating quickly and multi-tasking both again cause a disconnect between the brain and body. We've all heard that it takes 20 minutes for the brain to get

the signal that you have had enough to eat. Even if you take at least 20 minutes to eat a meal, when your brain is engaged and focused on other activities, it can easily miss the signals that you have, in fact, had enough to eat. You eat a lot more than your body needs. In our quest for a lifestyle that supports a healthy weight, it benefits us to not only look at what we eat, but how we eat.

This introduces us to the benefits of mindful eating. Mindful eating is simply focusing on the eating process, enjoying the moment, and reconnecting to the cues from our body. Mindful eating increases the enjoyment of food if we are hungry and the food is good. It decreases the enjoyment if we are not hungry and the food not so good. After bariatric surgery, the body almost requires that you practice mindful eating—slow your eating, take small bites and chew food completely. But for some, the old highly ingrained habits take back over. Conscious effort can increase mindful eating.

PRACTICE MINDFUL EATING

Practice mindful eating 5 times this week to re-connect the brain/body and enjoy eating again. Eliminate as many distractions as possible. Find a quiet place to focus on your meal. Eat in silence.



- First, ask yourself if you are really physically hungry. If your hunger cues are not accurate, you may use a schedule to determine when to eat.
- Second, look at your food with a sense of gratitude for where it came from, those who helped grow or prepare it, and how it will nourish your body. Stay present in the moment.
- As you bring a small bite of food to your mouth, enjoy the smell. Notice how the food feels on your tongue. Really taste the food. Move it around your mouth. Does it taste different on different parts of your tongue? Does it make any noise as you bite it? Chew it very slowly.
- As you swallow it, notice it leaving your mouth. Can you feel it passing through your esophagus? Is there an aftertaste?
- Rate the food on a scale of 1-10.
- Continue to take small bites of the food. Put your eating utensil down in between bites. Savor each bite of food. Check your body's cues and decide when you have had enough to eat.

As you become mindful of the foods that you eat, you can break free of ingrained habits and develop a healthy relationship with food.