

Mindful Eating

What Is It?

Eating mindfully means that you are using all of your physical and emotional senses to experience and enjoy the food choices you make. This helps to increase gratitude for food, which can improve the overall eating experience. Mindful eating encourages one to make choices that will be satisfying and nourishing to the body. However, it discourages “judging” one’s eating behaviors as there are different types of eating experiences. As we become more aware of our eating habits, we may take steps towards behavior changes that will benefit ourselves and our environment.



How It Works

Mindful eating focuses on your eating experiences, body-related sensations, and thoughts and feelings about food, with heightened awareness and without judgment. Attention is paid to the foods being chosen, internal and external physical cues, and your responses to those cues. [1] The goal is to promote a more enjoyable meal experience and understanding of the eating environment. Fung and colleagues described a mindful eating model that is guided by four aspects: *what to eat*, *why we eat* *what we eat*, *how much to eat*, and *how to eat*. [1]

Mindful eating:

- considers the wider spectrum of the meal: where the food came from, how it was prepared, and who prepared it
- notices internal and external cues that affect how much we eat
- notices how the food looks, tastes, smells, and feels in our bodies as we eat
- acknowledges how the body feels after eating the meal
- expresses gratitude for the meal
- may use deep breathing or meditation before or after the meal
- reflects on how our food choices affect our local and global environment

Seven practices of mindful eating

From *SAVOR: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life* [2]

1. Honor the food.

Acknowledge where the food was grown and who prepared the meal. Eat without distractions to help deepen the eating experience.

2. Engage all senses.

Notice the sounds, colors, smells, tastes, and textures of the food and how you feel when eating. Pause periodically to engage these senses.

3. Serve in modest portions.

This can help avoid overeating and food waste. Use a dinner plate no larger than 9 inches across and fill it only once.

4. Savor small bites, and chew thoroughly.

These practices can help slow down the meal and fully experience the food's flavors.

5. Eat slowly to avoid overeating.

If you eat slowly, you are more likely to recognize when you are feeling satisfied, or when you are about 80% full, and can stop eating.

6. Don't skip meals.

Going too long without eating increases the risk of strong hunger, which may lead to the quickest and easiest food choice, not always a healthful one. Setting meals at around the same time each day, as well as planning for enough time to enjoy a meal or snack reduces these risks.

7. Eat a plant-based diet, for your health and for the planet.

Consider the long-term effects of eating certain foods. Processed meat and saturated fat are associated with an increased risk of [colon cancer](#) and [heart disease](#). Production of animal-based foods like meat and dairy takes [a heavier toll on our environment](#) than plant-based foods.

References:

1. Fung TT, Long MW, Hung P, Cheung LW. An expanded model for mindful eating for health promotion and sustainability: issues and challenges for dietetics practice. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. 2016 Jul 1;116(7):1081-6.
2. Hanh TN, Cheung L. *Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life*. HarperCollins Publishers. 2010.

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