

# Food for Thought

## What is mindful eating?

- 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.
- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating.
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, neutral or dislikes) without judgment.



### Free Handout for Individuals from The Center for Mindful Eating

## How to Set Up a Daily Mindful Eating Practice

By Ronna Kabatznick, Ph.D

Eating is such a significant part of our daily lives, yet it's so easy to be disconnected from it. In one moment, our plates are full, and in another, completely empty. What happened? We hardly tasted or consciously enjoyed even one bite.

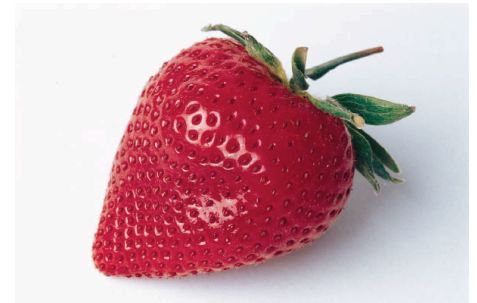


We can change this mechanical way of eating by establishing a daily mindful eating practice.

**Make the commitment.** Set aside a few minutes each day to practice mindful eating. Start with committing to eating one meal or snack mindfully each day – or even one part of a snack or meal – and then increase the amount of time every week or two, until you find you can do this with every meal or snack. If possible, try to choose a time when you can focus your attention, without a lot of distraction such as loud music or interruptions. Mindful eating includes many aspects: awareness of hunger, fullness, taste and choice. This practice focuses primarily on the taste experience.

**Make a simple food choice.** It's helpful to begin a mindful eating practice with a small amount of one type of food that is not a trigger food for overeating (a food that doesn't stimulate the desire to overeat). For example, a simple food choice may be a carrot, one or

two grapes, or slices of banana. As mindfulness grows and deepens, choose more challenging foods, such as a few chocolate chips or cookies.



**Offer your full attention.** Begin by picking up and holding the piece of food, such as a grape, in your hand. Allow your senses to become alive: smell the grape, notice its contours, shape, colors, how it feels in your palm, between your fingers. When the mind wanders to thoughts of the past or future, gently bring it back to the grape. There is no other grape like it in the universe. Then, mindfully lift your hand and place the grape in your mouth.



### **Be mindful of thoughts and feelings.**

There may be anticipation: "It's going to be so good. I hope there's more." Or, maybe there is a feeling of disappointment: "It's only a grape, not a brownie." Let the thoughts come and let them go.

**Notice as flavors come and go.** As you begin to chew, notice the burst of flavor, the tartness, the sweetness, as the grape breaks down in your mouth. Notice that just as the flavor begins to fade, there may be a strong desire to want another grape, even when you're still eating this one. See if you can relax. *Stay with what you are actually experiencing, rather than going for that next hit of flavor.*

See if you can stay with the sensations as the grape reaches your tummy, and recognize that you have taken in the food value and nutrition of one grape.

**Notice craving.** Once you finish this entire process, and only then, reach for the next grape, if you choose. Notice if you're tempted with the feeling of craving more, and if you are actually still physically hungry. You may notice

how mindfully eating just one grape offers so much satisfaction. Or, in the midst of eating this grape, the thought may arise: "If only I had a handful of nuts, I'd be happy." When you are gripped by craving, the opportunity for satisfaction vanishes. Mindfulness brings you back to the present moment, to the direct experience of eating one bite at a time.

**Taste directly.** We can allow the senses to come alive by experiencing taste directly. By letting yourself stay with the taste

and feel of this bite, the possibility of satisfaction opens. What does one bite offer? How many bites does it take to experience satisfaction? Let each bite reveal the answer.

**The power of choice.** There is tremendous power in bringing our body and mind together. It helps us see that we have a choice: We can actually taste and experience what we're eating, or we can eat unskillfully and miss the whole thing entirely. As you become more attuned to tasting and mindfully recognizing the value of food, this practice can be a welcome companion each time you eat, whether you are alone or surrounded by many.

**Renew your daily commitment to mindful eating practice.** Begin again and again. There are many insights and eating experiences to savor as the journey continues.

*Ronna Kabatznick, Ph.D., is a TCME Board Member and an Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at UCSF. [rkabatznick@tcme.org](mailto:rkabatznick@tcme.org)*

### **Internet Resources**

[www.tcme.org](http://www.tcme.org)  
[www.mindfuleating.org](http://www.mindfuleating.org)  
[www.mindfulpractices.com](http://www.mindfulpractices.com)  
[www.slowfoodusa.org](http://www.slowfoodusa.org)  
[www.eatingmindfully.com](http://www.eatingmindfully.com)  
[www.bodypositive.com](http://www.bodypositive.com)

*"Stay with what you are actually experiencing, rather than going for that next hit of flavor."*