MINDFUL EATING

MAY 12, 2020

Does this sound familiar?
• Snacking while watching TV or scrolling your feed
• Opening the fridge or pantry when you are bored
• Eating a meal in less than 10 minutes
• Eating when you aren’t hungry
• Feeling like you have to eat everything on your plate or past the point of fullness
• Eating an entire bag of chips without realizing it

Mindless eating is common, especially now that many people are spending more time at home with immediate access to food. Eating out of boredom or emotion on occasion is not an issue, but over time can contribute to negative effects on the body and brain. Mindful eating is a concept that encourages you to be fully present, without judgement, at meals and snacks.

What is mindful eating?
• Awareness and honor of physical hunger and fullness cues
• Acknowledge responses to foods without judgement
• Gratitude towards nourishing your body and/or satisfying your taste buds with food
• Active choice in what, when, and how much to eat

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In order to better practice mindful eating, it’s helpful to be able to recognize the difference between physical and emotional hunger.

**Physical hunger:**
- Comes on gradually
- Occurs out of physical need
- Patient—can wait until a meal is prepared
- Open to different foods
- Awareness of eating/surroundings

**Emotional hunger:**
- Comes on suddenly
- Food specific
- Urgent—cannot wait for prepared meal
- Paired with emotion
- Absent minded
- Does not notice fullness
- Feels guilt/shame

Emotional eating on occasion is not something to be ashamed of. Food is comforting. However, to use food as a coping mechanism consistently over time often does not serve or address the root issue. A counselor and dietitian can work through this with you.

**Mindful eating tips:**
- Decide if physically or emotionally hungry
- If you think you might be emotionally hungry, ask yourself “What will best help me in this moment?” Try a few deep breaths, a quick walk, calling a loved one, or drinking a glass of water.
- If you are physically hungry, choose what feels satisfying, regardless of how healthy you perceive that food to be. Portion your food onto a plate, not out of the package.
- Sit down at a table, without your laptop or phone
- Take a few deep breaths: Inhale relaxation. Exhale any tension or judgement about food or eating
- Eat only, don’t multi-task
- Gauge your hunger and satisfaction periodically

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If that feels overwhelming:
- Start with one meal each day or a few times each week
- Don’t worry about being perfect
- Replace "I shouldn’t eat this" with "I choose to eat this"
- Use utensils, set down between bites
- Eat with your non dominant hand if you tend to eat too quickly
- Find an end of meal ritual—gum, hot tea, small piece of dark chocolate, walk, etc

Mindful eating can be a helpful tool to take a step back, even for just a few minutes, from the stressors of life and be fully present in our surroundings. Give it a try and let us know what you think!

To schedule an appointment with our dietitian, please call (405) 325-4441 and press option (1) for clinic appointments.

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