



21) Mindful Eating for the Holidays and Beyond

When we slow down and pay attention to the present moment and all that the moment has to offer, we are being mindful. Typically in this society, we tend not to be mindful. We are always in a hurry rushing to get through our never ending list of necessary tasks. Or, we relive or regret things from the past and worry about the future. It is not necessary or healthy to do either. If you take a deep breath and recognize the **GIFT** that the **PRESENT** moment offers, you will live a calmer and healthier life.

This is true when it comes to eating too. How many of you (me included) rush through a meal because you believe that you don't have enough time. This includes rushing to grab something and not taking the time to prepare a nice meal or hurrying to shove the food down your throat as quickly as possible as you stand by the kitchen sink or are driving in your car. Well, this may not only cause digestive problems, this lifestyle may also lead to grabbing unhealthy "fast" foods or cause you to overeat, even when you are not truly hungry.

As the holidays approach, this can be an even greater issue causing unnecessary weight gain or other more serious health challenges. By being mindful when it comes to eating, you will enjoy the holidays more and feel better come January 1. The special tips I share in this article on mindful eating will help you get through the holidays in a more healthful and happy way and will teach you ways of living and eating that will benefit you for the rest of your life.

THE KEY IS BEING PRESENT:

1) GAUGE YOUR HUNGER LEVEL

When you are mindful, you are fully present, in the moment, without negative judgment. If you are mindful when eating, it helps you to pay more attention to your bodily cues so you can hear when you are truly hungry and when you are full. You may choose to ask yourself, "how hungry am I?" When you pause to ask this question, it slows you down enough to decide what is best for your body. Aim to eat until you are satisfied without being stuffed. Learn next week why this is amazing for your health and longevity.

2) PRACTICE ATTENTIVE EATING

We are all busy and have **A LOT ON OUR PLATE!** Because of this, we do not make eating a priority and we rush to grab anything in a pinch. If you are working or studying or watching TV, take a break and give your meal or snack your full attention. Try to avoid multitasking and avoid eating while distracted.

- a) **Pay attention and observe the quality of the food that you are eating.** Are the ingredients fresh and healthful? Were they raised or produced with care for the environment? If you are eating animal foods, were the animals raised in a normal



healthy environment and treated humanely? Were they fed foods that are natural for them and also of good quality? I don't mean to sound like a political/environmental activist here, but the care and energy that goes into the way food is produced affects the energy and nourishment of the food that goes into your body. You will feel better both emotionally and physically when you take the time to consider these factors. Do the best you can to provide healthful natural foods but by no means beat yourself up if things are not perfect.

- b) **Observe all of your senses.** What does the food look like? Is it on a beautiful plate and does the food have lots of colors and appealing textures? Take one second to smell the food and enjoy the aroma. Take your first mindful bite. Was it the right amount to fit into your mouth comfortably? What does the texture feel like on your tongue and the roof of your mouth? What does it taste like? Can you sense the various flavors of sweet and salty, sour, bitter and astringent? Are you enjoying the beautiful experience of truly tasting your food for possibly the first time? Eating is far more enjoyable when it is a sensory experience.

When eating becomes more enjoyable in this way, it is more fulfilling and satisfying and will help you to eat more moderate amounts of food. We continue to stuff our mouths when we are not gaining fully from the eating experience. We tend not to feel satisfied with the meal so we continue to eat in hopes that we will reach a point of satisfaction and fulfillment. We end up just feeling stuffed and unhappy with our eating habits otherwise.

3)PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR THOUGHTS

a)**Please try not to eat when you are upset or stressed.** Not only can stress keep you from absorbing nutrients properly, it is very hard on your digestive system and your overall health. Please take a break and take several deep breaths to relax before trying to eat again. Or, simply wait until later when the negative excitement of the stressful situation has passed.

b) **Learn to pay attention to see if your thoughts are helping you to feel good or not.** If not, choose a thought that feels better. Are you beating yourself up for being overweight and criticizing yourself for eating? Are you telling yourself that what you are eating is going to ruin your health or cause unwanted weight gain? Please know that there is some called "biology of belief" and the cells of your body will respond to what you are telling them. Be kind to yourself and love yourself and your food. As you feel better and more fulfilled emotionally from the eating experience, you will tend to eat in a more healthful and balanced way.



4) PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR WORDS

Saying things that are negative about ourselves or others can really have an impact on everyone's self-esteem. Please try to refrain from saying anything critical to the people you are sharing a meal with. Keep any arguments or criticism for a later time. This includes saying bad things about yourself to others while eating. Are you telling your friend that you are so fat and will never fit into your jeans after eating this meal? Give yourself and others positive encouragement about their eating habits and the foods they are choosing.

5) APPRECIATE YOUR FOOD AND GIVE THANKS

Growing up, many of us said grace or gave thanks for the food in some way that was traditional for our families. Today, it seems as if fewer and fewer people are giving thanks and feeling the appreciation for the foods we are eating and for the friends or family members with which we are sharing a meal. Try expressing your gratitude for the abundant food that we enjoy in this country. Appreciate all food equally, no matter how you may judge its nutritional value or taste. Consider all of the love and care and energy that went into making that food available to you. Think about the sun and rain and soil that nourished the produce and the farm hands that picked and package and shipped that to your town. Think about all of the grocery store clerks and managers that work hard too to make these foods so readily and easily available to us. And of course, give thanks to you or anyone that took the time to prepare the beautiful meal. You will be amazed at how wonderful you will feel emotionally when you take a few seconds to give thanks. This naturally will help you to reduce your stress and open you up to the healthful aspects of enjoying great food.

These are the first key points for mindful eating. When you begin to practice even just some of these suggestions, you will begin to notice how much more you are enjoying your foods and how much more fulfilled each meal will be.

Next week, I will continue this topic with wonderful and simple tricks to help you eat healthier and in a more balanced way during the holidays. Enjoying the variety of delicious foods that are available during this time of year is all part of living a happy and enjoyable life. Learning ways to intelligently indulge is key. Join me next week for some great tips you will be so glad to know.