



# Weight Loss the Mindful Way

If you're trying to lose weight and not succeeding, part of the problem might be that you are eating mindlessly. Mindless eating means that what, when and how much we eat runs counter to both the body's true needs and our own health goals.

Learn below how you can switch from mindless to mindful eating to support weight loss. Kelly McGonigal, PhD, health psychologist and yoga teacher at Stanford University, shares her insights.

## From Mindless to Mindful Eating

Mindless eating is a major saboteur of weight loss. "In many cases, it's not the meals we eat that cause weight gain," says Susan Albers, PsyD, author of *Eat, Drink and Be Mindful* (New Harbinger 2009). "It's the snacking, the mindless eating while watching television, when we're on autopilot and not really aware of what we're eating. Plus, the majority of food decisions have nothing to do with hunger. They have to do with stress, anxiety, sadness or frustration."

Mindfulness can help. Mindfulness means paying attention, both to inner cues (thoughts, emotions and sensations) and to your environment. When applied

to eating, this can mean the difference between one more failed diet and lasting weight loss.

## Three Components of Mindful Eating

How can you eat mindfully? Albers breaks mindful eating into three areas.

- 1. Mindful Eating in the Moment.** Get rid of distractions like reading, watching television or eating on the go and really taste, smell and enjoy your food. Practice knowing what it feels like to be hungry or full, and learn to honor those signals.
- 2. Nonjudgmental Awareness of Eating Habits and Beliefs.** Keep a food journal to get a clear sense of your eating habits, including where you keep food and how you go about food shopping. Also, notice how you talk to yourself about food. Common self-defeating beliefs include not wanting to waste food and putting foods into "good" and "bad" categories.
- 3. Nonjudgmental Awareness of Environmental and Emotional Triggers.** A bakery case of pastries may trigger a craving that was not there a moment ago. That craving has nothing to do with the body's true needs and everything to do with the eating environment. A mindful approach can help you become aware of the difference. When you are aware of your personal triggers, it is easier to avoid them or to pause and make a conscious choice. Also, mindfulness can help you recognize when you are eating for emotional reasons and can allow you to develop other strategies for self-soothing or celebrating. ■

## Mindful Eating Exercises

Susan Albers, PsyD, suggests the following simple exercises:

1. As you eat, pay close attention to all your senses. Use your tongue to feel the texture of the food. Gauge its temperature. Take a whiff of the aroma. Ask yourself, "How does this really taste? Is this something I really want? Does it satisfy my taste buds?"
2. Change how you eat and slow down. For example, use chopsticks, eat in a new location or include new foods in your diet. Put down your fork intentionally at least three times during a meal to give yourself a moment to pause.
3. When you eat, just eat. Try turning off the television while you eat and avoiding other distractions to keep you focused on your food. Even if it is just for a few moments, put down whatever you're doing and focus on your snack.
4. Pay attention to the cues your body is sending. How does it let you know you are hungry? Have a rumbling stomach? Or low energy? Before you take a bite, ask yourself, "How hungry am I on a scale of 1-10?"
5. When you have the urge to eat, ask yourself if you are physically or emotionally hungry. If you are emotionally hungry, set a timer for 2 minutes and find an activity to distract you, or another way to soothe yourself. At the end of the 2 minutes, ask yourself again. This will help you slow down the rush to eat in order to fix your feelings.

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