## A Summer of Mindful Eating

Here where I live in California and so much of the rest of the U.S., life is bursting out again. Our social calendars are beginning to fill, and many opportunities to eat a variety of delicious foods are presenting themselves. Everywhere I look there is a happy hum – summer barbecues, sumptuous potluck spreads at parties, unlimited restaurant dining with menu items that delight our taste buds, and an abundance of fresh summer fruits and vegetables at our local markets.

With the pandemic mostly behind us, this is an opportunity to pause and re-evaluate how we wish to approach our [eating with mindfulness](https://vibe.emindful.com/programs/117). Many of us gained weight during the past year due to the effects of stress on the body with emotional eating and eating that filled the void when the usual ways we found pleasure, comfort and joy disappeared.

Mindfulness and principles of mindful eating can help us re-embrace our eating in a way that brings great pleasure and delight, decreases stress and binge eating, and teaches us to listen and know when enough is enough – helping our bodies recalibrate and come back to a natural balance. We can celebrate our bodies and acknowledge how we respond to the cycles of life, expected and unexpected with kindness and without judgment.

**Re-Embrace Your Eating – Increase pleasure and delight**

Food itself is really a wonder and miracle, yet often before eating, we do not take a mindful pause to appreciate where it comes from – the elements in nature that helped this food grow; the sunshine, rain, earth, the hands that picked or prepared the food, and the care and thoughtfulness that went into the cooking of the food.

We can also appreciate the food with our senses – with our eyes noticing the colors, textures, shapes, our noses smelling the subtle aromas as we bring the first bites to our mouth, and our ears noticing the crunch, sizzle, or crackle of what we’re eating.

While eating the food, we can continue to appreciate it, particularly by paying attention to the texture and taste, and really savoring each bite.  This includes mindfully swallowing when you are complete with each bite and sensing how this is nourishing your body.

When we pay attention to the act of being present and savoring our food fully with all our senses, a whole universe can open up in that moment filled with nourishment, appreciation and gratitude. We may often find we enjoy more but need to eat less to feel fully satisfied because we are so present with what and how much we are eating.

**Decrease Stress Eating**

Before eating, we can also add on what I call the mindful check in. Here we pause, take a few relaxing breaths, and notice what we are “bringing to the table.” What thoughts, feelings and emotions are present? How physically hungry are you? How might you inform your eating through being more mindful? If you notice you are stressed, anxious, bored, or frustrated, you can try a few mindful emotional management practices in that moment:

* Take a few more deep relaxing breaths. Label the emotion you have become aware of. This helps decrease the intensity. If you are physically hungry, proceed to eat with more awareness, and less emotional or stress reactivity.
* Ask yourself what it is you truly need in the moment and give that to yourself. This could include a variety of non-food nourishing activities such as movement, exercise, fresh air, social connection, stepping away from the computer, gardening, taking a walk in nature, finding stillness through mindfulness meditation, or simply offering yourself some self-compassion and putting a hand on your heart for a moment.
* When you do eat, practice everything else described in this blog, including savoring with all your senses, and awareness of when you are satisfied.

**Listening to your Body – When Enough is Enough**

When we eat, we often check out or go mindless, not even noticing the experience of eating or when we actually begin to feel full. As the social situations increase this summer where you will have more opportunities to share food with others, you can use the principles of mindful eating to check in and stay connected to what your body needs as well as to the conversation that may be happening around you. Try things differently. If you tend to pile your plate too high, try smaller amounts than you usually take. Eat and savor what you have and go back for seconds if you are still hungry or want to taste a delicious dish one more time.

Listen to your body. Check in at least several times while eating to notice when you are beginning to get full. Consider stopping when you feel comfortably full or just before. Be open to other forms of nourishment around you when you have had enough, like continuing to be part of a satisfying conversation, wandering over to enjoy a beautiful garden, offering to help clear plates, and the appreciation and the satisfaction of helping out.

**Staying in Balance**

Nourishment comes in all forms. When we are more fully resourced in the different aspects of our lives, and practice the skills and tools of mindful eating, food can take its natural place in amount, pleasure, and quality in our lives. And as our lives open up this summer, we have an opportunity to re-embrace the way we live and eat with mindfulness, fully savoring each bite and each moment.

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