

# Mindful Eating Made Simple (20 Most Practical Tips)

*Mindful eating* or *eating mindfully* can help you avoid overeating and binge-eating, lose extra pounds, control your blood sugar if you have diabetes mellitus, and restrict your eating to only what your body requires.

It is a technique that brings greater awareness to your eating. It can help you enjoy a meal fully while eating in moderation.

Studies suggest that mindfulness-based habits can improve the way we eat.

## What Is Mindful Eating?

**Mindful eating is paying full attention to the process of eating from moment to moment, with curiosity, savoring, and non-judgment. It is engaging with food via the senses and appreciating its journey from the farm to the body.**

Mindful eating (i.e., paying attention to our food, on purpose, moment by moment, without judgment) is an approach to food that focuses on individuals' sensual awareness of the food and their experience of the food. It has little to do with calories, carbohydrates, fat, or protein.

— Joseph B. Nelson, *Mindful Eating: The Art of Presence While You Eat*, 2017

Mindfulness is the process of keeping the mind within the present moment, without thinking about the future or past. Mindfulness helps you identify and accept your emotions and sensations as they happen.

## 20 Most Helpful Tips To Start Mindful Eating

Mindful eating helps your brain and gut to communicate with each other, so you know exactly when you are hungry, satisfied, or over-full. It helps you understand if a food craving is emotional or physical.

It increases your awareness of *food-based triggers*, like junk food advertisements, and enables you to respond rationally to them.



Mindful eating is fully engaging with the food and eating instead of gulping down mindlessly.

*Eating mindfully is the opposite of emotional eating.* Mindfulness in eating is about intently engaging with the food and the process of eating, instead of absent-mindedly gulping down whatever is on our plate.

A mindful eater focuses on appreciating the food while eating it, whether the food is homemade or gourmet.

### 1. Pay Attention While Eating

This is the basic and primary premise of mindful eating. You gather all your attention from everywhere else and apply all of it to your food and eating.

Your attention is mostly scattered at any point in your day because you are great at multitasking.

The modern lifestyle has made you a deft juggler at doing many things at the same time. And the time you do this most often is when you are eating.

That is the time you take calls, reply to emails and messages, check your social media, watch videos, or play games on your phone.

You are bad at paying attention to your food. You feel you are wasting your precious minutes eating your food with your entire attention to it.

So, you eat while watching movies and shows. You eat while using your phone for everything that can be done with the device.

Probably, you are so busy in those other activities that you don't even realize whether it is food or paper you are chewing.

Even when you are about to start a fine meal at a great place, your best attention to it comes *before* you even pick up the spoon – when you take a picture and share it with your friends and followers. Soon after, your interest wanes and your focus veers off from your meal to other things.

Stop doing that. Instead:

- Savor the food with all your senses.
- Pay your best attention to your eating.
- See the details, smell the aroma, and appreciate the texture.
- Switch off your screen (if not your phone) when you sit down to eat.
- Let the feelings pervade your mind as you chew and taste its bites with love.

When you eat with mindfulness, you also find it easier to realize when your stomach indicates it would rather not take any more food, and you need to stop stuffing your mouth.

## 2. Do Not Rush Through Eating

You are eating your food, not making a dash-or-die run through a windstorm. Start with these questions to yourself:

- Do you always feel the need to rush through your eating?
- Do you pride yourself on being a fast eater?
- Do you eat your lunch at your desk to save time?
- How many minutes does a rushed meal save you?

Answering the questions above will help you understand your eating behavior better. If you are always in a mad rush to push the food down your gullet and run back to whatever you were doing, then do you realize your stomach needs at least 20 minutes to digest the food?

Eating is a process that needs your time. When you eat your food slowly, you get to savor it and understand well in advance when to pause or stop.

But when you rush the process, firstly you fail to realize if you have eaten much more than what your body would have wanted you to. Your hurrying only aims at finishing the food on the plate, without letting you know if you actually need it or not.

Secondly, you do not give your stomach enough time to churn the food in small amounts. You fill it up and force it to deal with all of it together. This results in bloating and acid brash (gastroesophageal reflux disease or GERD).

Eating on the go is not something you should be proud of. Often it gets embarrassing when others make an egregious comment on your eating speed.

The slow eating movement that is the new rage the world over is an ideal way to practice mindful eating.

For example, it is customary to have two-hour-long dinners in Spain. The Spanish people savor the smells and flavors of their meals while leisurely sipping their wine.

Another great tip is this: *hara hachi bu*.

*Hara hachi bu* is a Japanese term meaning: **Eat until you are 80% full.**

The tradition originated in Okinawa, an island city in Japan. Okinawa is a blue zone. The blue zones are geographical areas where people have extraordinarily long and healthy lives.

Hara hachi bu keeps the Okinawans alert about how full they are while eating. So, they can stop when their stomachs are almost full. It helps them control their eating and prevents them from over-eating.

A brilliant book on living and eating like some of the healthiest people on earth by Dan Buettner: **The Blue Zones Solution**.

### 10 Tips For Mindful Eating

#### 3. Do Not Skip Any Major Meal

Your three major meals are breakfast, lunch, and dinner. When you skip one of these, it becomes quite a formidable challenge to make the right food choices at the next mealtime.

With a skipped meal, the next time you feel hungry, you grab anything that presents itself for a bite. And what you grab is mostly unhealthy food.

Missing your lunch could lead you to grab some fast food and eat it in the car on your way back home. You stop at a vending machine to pick up something junk or visit the nearest superstore for a bite of snack food.

To prevent this, you need to give your body the discipline of timed meals. And to achieve that, it goes best to plan all your meal times early in the day. It is difficult, of course. But it gives some great results.

So, sit down with a diary or planner in the morning and fix what are you going to eat for the day, along with the time for each meal.

Do this for a week, and you find it becomes an exciting and feel-good exercise. Follow this for a few weeks until you feel you are confident enough to have weekly plans for meals ready at your disposal.

If, in a month or so, there is a need for change, go back to your planner and make modifications as you feel the best. Repeat.

Once you create a plan, follow it through with dedication and discipline. Even if you slip up sometimes, your success is in going back to the good habit. When you miss it, you do not fail. Instead, you learn something new by analyzing why you gave it a miss.



Choose your daily 3 meals mindfully.

#### 4. Always Chew Your Food Well

*Is there a magic number to guide you to how many times you must chew your food?*

Yes, it is **32**, as most people say. *That number equals the number of teeth an adult human has.*

However, thirty-two may not be an always-on number. For more chewy things, your teeth may need to grind it 40 times, while for softer things, it could take around 20. It is not a holy grail figure.

To be fair, it is only a helpful number to guide you on how many times you should chew any morsel.

As you might know, digestion begins in the mouth. It starts when we chew on the food. A good chewing practice mashes and liquefies the food so that the stomach has to do less work when it reaches there.

Chewing also mixes the food with the digestive enzymes present in the saliva. And saliva contains the enzyme **ptyalin**, which breaks down starch into simpler

sugars. Thus, with proper chewing, you could digest up to 30% of the starch in our food.

- Chewing well reduces your chances of choking on the food.
- *When you chew well, you also tend to eat less.*
- Good chewing helps you slow down your eating speed and lets you taste your food fully.

So, masticate (or chew) your food well.

## 5. Avoid Overeating At All Times

The primary goal and reason for eating, we often forget, is to satisfy hunger and to keep the body healthy. And so because we forget that the basic reason, we often end up eating way more than our bodies need.

### **Why do we overeat?**

For most practical purposes, we overeat because:

1. we fail to note our body's signals that we're full
2. we're afraid we might not eat a splendid meal in a long time
3. we have food left on our plate or table that we feel we must finish
4. we've paid for unlimited servings, so why not stuff as much as we can
5. we're encouraged to overeat to show our appreciation for the food

We live in a culture that revolves around food, and a world that produces more food than we could ever eat. It leads to most of us *eating mindlessly*, that is, eating with our minds roaming elsewhere.

We rarely realize there is only a thin line between eating enough and overeating. The reason is mostly the same attitude of mindlessness we carry to your eating tables.

You keep on eating for reasons you're not aware of most of the time. How often do you realize you've eaten to finish the food rather than to fill your hunger?

But if you're mindful, it becomes easy to sense the point when you are no more hungry and can walk away from your plate.

While eating, make it a goal to eat until you're satiated. Make this decision a little before your food arrives. Otherwise, once the food sits before you, your unconscious intention is to clean it off the plate. Eat to nourish yourself. Learn to set a limit on the food you will eat and watch yourself when eating.

A good practice is to use smaller portions in one go. It makes you move to get another helping of the food. If possible, ask to limit the serving at your table as you eat.

## 6. Connect Deep With Your Food

Do not start eating the moment you reach your plate. Do not pounce on the food as soon as you get to it.

To sound rude, that's what animals do. They don't know when or where the next food is coming through, but you know you have plentiful.

So, you need not jump at your food as if the next one is uncertain to come by.

- Instead, think about the food's journey from the field to your plate.
- Let your mind flip through the images of people who made it possible to get you fed today.
- Take a few moments to thank them in your mind.
- It will help you connect with your food in a more meaningful way.
- In some ways, connecting with your food and being grateful for it is perhaps the most crucial part of mindful eating.

When you reflect on the entire process that made it possible for you to eat today, you feel connected to the web of life.

You no more see your food as something that came off a supermarket shelf.

Instead, you see the thousands of hands that worked for it.

This realization can be a wake-up call to be more *appreciative and respectful* of your food from now on.





Being grateful for your food is a vital part of mindful eating.

The ground rules of mindful eating are to eat with acceptance, patience, curiosity, and non-judgment.

#### 7. Respect The Food

Honor your meal and express gratitude before you start eating. Thank the people (farmer, transporter, cook) who made your meal possible. Have some water before your first bite; it signals your stomach to get ready to receive food.

#### 8. Do Not Talk Shop

Do not talk or think about work or news or problems. Do not take your fights and arguments to the dining table. Do not feed yourself anger and resentment while eating your food.

#### 9. Eat Silently, Without Talking

Eat in silence while savoring your food. If you must talk, then keep your conversations around nutrition and food. Eat in peace, without any diversions, like television, laptop, or mobile.

#### 10. Take Moderate Servings

Let each serving be modest. Moderation is of the essence when it comes to mindful eating. Smaller portions make you eat less and waste less, as you're not

'nudged' by a larger serving to eat until the last bite.

#### 11. Eat Slow, Without Any Hurry

Eat slow. Slowing down our eating process allows your brains to catch up with your body, clearly reading the signals if it's full. Eat with your whole consciousness. Take brief breaks between a few bites. And ask yourself intermittently if you're feeling satiated.

#### 12. Address Your Anxiety Issues

Comfort foods are for comforting your unhappy feelings – like sadness, loneliness, boredom, anger, stress, and frustration. Address them first. Solve them instead of soothing yourself out of those unpleasant feelings through food.

#### 13. Avoid Places That Lure Into Eating

Stay sharply aware of the situations and places that make you eat automatically. You might be usually eating meals while watching movies or munching things while catching up on a television show. These are forms of mindless eating. Avoid them like the plague.

#### 14. Do Not Eat From The Box

Do not eat your food out of the pack or pot it came in. Sit down at the table, pour or serve it on a bowl or plate, then eat. Plan ahead when and what you will eat—it reduces stress and allows for mindful eating. Planning ahead also makes you more likely to eat only the type and amount your body needs.

#### 15. Have A Mindful Kitchen

Have a mindful kitchen. Keep all your food ingredients arranged neatly. Organize your kitchen in such a way that it doesn't tax your brain to find out where is a certain thing when you need it. Stay stocked on healthy foods more than snack-type foods.

#### 16. Eat A Variety of Foods

Eat a variety of nutritionally healthy foods. When you eat foods of different types, colors, textures, or tastes, you find it easier to pay attention to them. A colorful salad along with cooked food provides two different mindful experiences.

#### 17. Follow The *Sit-Slow-Savor* Rule

The 3 S's of mindful eating are **sit down, slow down, and savor down**. However, it needs conscious practice to put it all together with every meal. Sitting down is easy. Slowing down can be helped with a timer or alarm clock. Set the timer to a few minutes more each day. And eat slowly to fill up the whole of the new time.

*Savoring down is the opposite of shoveling down.*

#### 18. Keep Food Away From Sight

Keep food away and out of your sight. This is more needed for ready-to-eat foods. Store these out of sight, at the back of the refrigerator, or on the topmost shelf in your kitchen cabinet. Do *not* buy ready-made juices. They carry unhealthy amounts of sugar, but are easy to fool you into thinking you are having wholesome food.

#### 19. Buy And Store Healthful Foods

Stock up on healthy foods. Go grocery shopping with a food list you had made mindfully over some days. Eat from restaurants that make wholesome food, not fast food.

#### 20. Cook Novel Types of Food

Learn to cook different and novel types of food. For example, when you wish to learn to make hummus or hash, you take yourself through a series of novel experiences – watching or reading the recipes, shopping for the ingredients, making the food, tasting it, and then eating it. It expands your mindful eating practice into a celebration and adventure.

In essence, mindful eating is eating with attention and intention.  
You note what you eat, and savor when you eat.

# Why Eat Mindfully: Benefits of Mindful Eating

Mindful eating involves:

- eating slowly and paying full attention to the eating process
- being aware of the physical hunger cues and eating only until full
- recognizing the non-hunger triggers and stopping self from eating
- engaging the senses to notice colors, aromas, sounds, textures, flavors
- eating mainly to build and maintain physical health and mental well-being
- appreciating and being grateful to all who helped bring food to your table

By eating mindfully, you tie your attention to your food and slow down your eating process, making it an intentional act rather than a hurried one. With mindful eating, you also become more aware of the triggers that make you want to eat, even though you may not be hungry.

Research has found mindful eating can improve depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and weight management. Mindful eating is also found effective in controlling some type 2 diabetes mellitus.

- Many of us would admit to grabbing some food while watching movies or when upset. Mindful eating teaches us the skills of letting go of established unhelpful patterns of eating because of stress or habit. Mindful eating can help us get better control of binge-eating and comfort eating.
- Eating more of any food reduces its tastefulness, as we know. No matter how much we like *hummus and falafel*, we cannot have it three times a day, seven days a week. Mindful eating helps us learn to differentiate between the hunger for food and the desire for food. It makes us enjoy our meals, and we tend not to overeat. It helps us appreciate the simple premise of eating, that is, to satisfy our hunger.
- Eating with stress on our mind and body, as happens in multitasking, can make us feel gloomy and bloated afterward. With the discipline of mindfulness in our eating, we bring positive changes in the areas of life outside our eating. Eating with mindful behavior can make us feel good about our bodies and ourselves later on.
- Mindful eating can help in weight management, as we discuss next.

## Weight Loss And Mindful Eating

Though it is *not* dieting of any kind, restricting or allowing certain foods, *or* counting the calories or amount of food, mindful eating helps people get into better shape and size.

And it happens without causing increased stress because its goal is not about losing or gaining weight, or getting into a certain shape or size.

- While mindfulness eating is not specifically anything like a weight loss program, still many people experience a loss in their weight in about eight to ten weeks.
- It could be explained by the fact that mindful eaters change their relationship with food and behave in a positively different way while eating.
- For example, mindful eaters tend to eat less because they are early to become aware of the fullness of their stomachs and stop eating at that point. Therefore, they rarely overeat.
- Even when a mindful eater sees enticing food, and takes to eating, they eat only until it satisfies their hunger, not a morsel more.
- Researchers found in a 2015 study, most of the people who approached their food with mindfulness lost a significant amount of weight, though they could not establish a direct relationship between the two.

## Summary: Mindful Eating Meditation

As you would know, our thoughts often carry us to somewhere else than where we are.

While at the office table, our mind is at the ping-pong table; at the ping-pong table, our mind is at the dinner table; and at the dinner table, our mind is at the office table.

We could solve this tiresome tendency of mind-wandering by replacing it with mindfulness. When in mindfulness, you can keep your mind around where your body is – instead of letting it wander.

Mindfulness is the practice of being aware of the surroundings where we are at the moment.

It trains us to notice when our mind wanders and to bring it back to the now. It is not some new, present-day practice, but its roots lie in the ancient Buddhist

and Zen traditions.

Mindfulness is defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn as:

...paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. — Full Catastrophe Living.

And mindful eating is based on the principles of mindfulness. In brief, mindful eating means eating with *attention* and *intention*. The attention is towards the experience of eating with full presence, while the intention is towards savoring the experience with all the senses. The ground rule of mindful eating is eating for eating, with acceptance, patience, curiosity, and non-judgment.

## Mindful Eating Quotes

To further inspire you into mindful eating, take a look at some wonderful quotes on conscious eating:

Mindful eating replaces self-criticism with self-nurturing. It replaces shame with respect for your own inner wisdom. — *Jan Chozen Bays*

How we do food is how we do life. Every meal is a metaphor for how you show up in the world. Are you present? Are you complaining? Are you multitasking? Add love, celebration, time, communion, and gratitude to every meal, and make every meal the best meal ever. — Marc David & Emily Rosen

Refrain from discussing subjects that can destroy your awareness of the people around you and the food. If someone is thinking about something apart from the good food on the table, such as his difficulties in the office or with friends, it means he is losing the present moment and the food.

You can help by returning his attention to the meal. — Thich Nhat Hanh, *How to Eat*

Emotional eating is an attempt to deal with a tough problem, feeling, or situation we don't otherwise know how to deal with, and often don't even know that we have without some kind of symptom to remind us. When we strip away the judgment of our emotional eating and stop calling it a disease, a defect, a problem in and of itself; we can finally see it for what it is: An alert that something in our life needs our attention. Something completely unrelated to food or our weight. Be grateful for the reminder.

— Isabel Foxen Duke

At the heart of every eating disorder, whether it is compulsive eating, bulimia, or anorexia, there is a cry from the deepest part of our souls that must be heard. It is a cry to awaken, to embrace our whole selves. It is a cry to deepen our understanding of who we really are. It is a longing to know ourselves in mind, body, and spirit. — *Normandi & Roark*

When practiced to its fullest, mindful eating turns a simple meal into a spiritual experience, giving us a deep appreciation of all that went into the meal's creation as well a deep understanding of the relationship between the food on our table, our own health, and our planet's health. — *Thich Nhat Hanh, Savor*

Practice mindful eating. Eating food is a somatic experience. It gives rise to all kinds of sensory experiences and sensations. When we are not fully present when we eat and when we eat too fast, we tune out this sensory experience and as a result, we do not experience our food fully. We take it for granted. We don't extract the full richness out of it. We can't tell how our bodies respond to certain foods. — *Teal Swan*