New York Times Article on Mindful Eating

The Surprising Benefits of Mindful Eating

Published on February 9, 2012 by [Susan Albers, Psy.D.](http://www.psychologytoday.com/experts/susan-albers-psyd) in [Comfort Cravings](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/comfort-cravings)

Mindful eating is no longer a secret! If you checked out the New York Times article entitled,[*Mindful* *Eating as Food for Thought*](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/08/dining/mindful-eating-as-food-for-thought.html), it's likely that it left you "hungry" for more information on how to adopt this healthy, healing way of eating. Mindful eating uses the ancient art of [mindfulness](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/mindfulness), or being present, to help cope with modern eating problems. It's not a [diet](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/diet). There are no menus or food restrictions. It is developing a new mindset around food.

The good news is that mindful eating can help binge eaters as well as many other eating issues. During the past twenty years, recent studies have found that mindful eating can help you to:

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1) Reduce overeating and [binge eating](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/eating-disorders). (Kristeller and Wolever 2011; Baer et al. 2005),

2) Lose weight and reduce your body mass index (BMI). (Tapper et al. 2009; Framson et al. 2009; Dalen et al. 2010)

3) Cope with chronic eating problems such as anorexia and [bulimia](http://www.psychologytoday.com/conditions/bulimia-nervosa), and reduce anxious thoughts about food and your body. (Proulx 2008; Rawal et al. 2009; Hepworth 2011)

4) Improve the symptoms of type 2 diabetes. (Rosenzweig et al. 2007; Faude-Lang et al. 2010).

Thus, it has many benefits!

Intuitively, it makes sense that mindful eating is helpful to overeaters. It slows you down, makes you more aware of portion sizes, and helps you get out of negative, automatic food habits like overeating while watching your favorite T.V. show. So how does it also help people who have other problematic eating habits?

In a nutshell, whether you are overeating or being overly restrictive when you diet, it's likely that you have lost track of your [hunger](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/appetite) and fullness. This break between your body and mind needs to be healed. Mindful eating can generally help in three ways:

**1) Mindful eating plugs you back into your body's cues so you know when to stop and start eating.** This can be such a difficult task if your sense of hunger and fullness has been skewed or warped by large restaurant portions, fad diets or comfort eating.

**2) Being mindful brings about better** [**management**](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/leadership) **of your emotions.** Sometimes people restrict or overeat as a way to cope with negative feelings. Eating and not eating can distract you from your worries. When you have healthier ways of coping, such as mindful breathing and letting go of anxiety, you no longer manage your emotions through your food choices. You can tolerate your emotions, as uncomfortable as they may be, without pushing them away or stuffing them down with food.

**3) Mindfulness changes the way you think.** Rather than reacting to food-related thoughts that urge you to overeat, overly restrict your diet, or emotionally eat, et cetera, you respond to them. You can hear these thoughts without obeying them.

So if you aren't a binge eating, don't worry. Mindful eating can be helpful to almost everyone.

**3 Ways to Get Started**

**1) Read Up!** This article gives you a brief summary of [8 fantastic books](http://my.psychologytoday.com/blog/comfort-cravings/201112/8-must-read-books-mindful-eating) that can help you to eat more mindfully.

**2) Just Be Mindful.** Being more attentive and aware in all aspects of your life can help you to improve your eating habits. This is good news if you aren't ready to change what you put on your plate. Start by being more mentally present with your significant other, put away your cell phone and be more engaged with what you are doing and do one thing at a time instead of multitasking. When you are ready to change your meal habits, you will have more practice on how to be attentive and present. It's easy to eat an entire plate of food and not taste one bite.

**3) The 4 Mindful Points:** Check in with each dimension of mindfulness. When you eat, ask yourself these questions:

**Mind**: Am I tasting each bite or am I zoned out when I eat? (Download the [awareness checklist](http://eatingmindfully.com/?page_id=10))

**Body:** How does my body feel before and after I eat? Low energy? Stomach rumbling? Full? Empty?

**Feeling:** What do I feel about this food? [Guilty](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/guilt)? Pleasure? Joy? Disappointment? Regret?

**Thoughts:** What thoughts does this food bring to mind? [Memories](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/memory)? Beliefs? Myths? Fears?

Thank you for the fantastic article on mindful eating! We need to continue to spread the word that diets don't work. Instead, mindful eating may be one key to turning around all of our unhealthy eating patterns. Eat, Drink & Be Mindful!

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See Dr. Susan Albers' new book, [*But I Deserve This Chocolate: the 50 Most Common Diet-Derailing and How to Outwit Them*](http://www.amazon.com/But-Deserve-This-Chocolate-Diet-Derailing/dp/1608820564/ref%3Dpd_sim_b_3). She is a psychologist for the Cleveland Clinic and author of five books on mindful eating including [50 Ways to Soothe Yourself Without Food](http://www.amazon.com/Ways-Soothe-Yourself-Without-Food/dp/1572246766/ref%3Dpd_vtp_b_1) and [Eating Mindfully 2nd edition (pre-order now!)](http://www.amazon.com/Eating-Mindfully-Mindless-Balanced-Relationship/dp/160882330X/ref%3Dsr_1_7?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1328812253&sr=1-7). Her books have been noted in O, the Oprah magazine, Shape, Prevention, Health etc. and seen on the Dr. Oz TV show.

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