

I love this quote from the US Centre for Mindful Eating, *“Mindful eating has an intent that at the end of the meal the person will feel physically better after eating than before.”*

With that in mind here’s a checklist you can use to create a Mindful Eating practice for yourself:

Listen to Your Body & Let Hunger Be Your Guide

This is particularly important if you have weight you want to lose or have a tendency toward binge eating.

Most of us don’t tune in to what our body needs, and instead feed it more or less the same thing each day, or use food to cover up our emotions, instead of allowing ourselves to sit with them.

The next time you go reaching for food, stop and ask yourself “Am I hungry?” If it’s a time between meals, ask yourself a more pointed question: “Am I hungry enough to eat an apple right now?” If yes, do that first and see if it satisfies the craving you’re having.

Differentiate Between Physical and Emotional Hunger

Once you get used to noticing your hunger, the next step is to work out if it’s physical or emotional hunger you’re experiencing.

Here are some ways to check:

- Is this Sudden OR Gradual Hunger? Emotional hunger feels sudden, while physical hunger is gradual.
- Am I feeling a Specific OR General Hunger? Emotional hunger is a craving for a specific food, while physical hunger has you open to different foods.
- Above the Neck vs. In the Stomach Hunger? You’ll feel emotional hunger in your mind and mouth, while physical hunger is felt growing and growling in your stomach.

If it’s emotional eating that’s driving you towards the fridge or vending machine right now, work out what might better serve you instead. Is it some fresh air, a rant with a friend, a hug, or just a glass of water?

Try one of these things first and check-in with yourself 30mins later – often a craving coming from emotional hunger will have subsided.

If, on the other hand, it’s true hunger, commit to making wise food choices by opting for foods including whole grains, lots of vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, healthy fats, and drink more water.

Make it an Experience

Now that you’ve decided to eat, make an effort to create an experience. First, tune into what your body needs and wants from this meal to have you feeling nourished and satiated.

Then, give yourself the time to relax and enjoy it. Even if it’s only 15 minutes.

Whenever possible, this means:

1) Preparing the meal yourself

2) Appreciating the ingredients: their colours, textures, aromas and flavours, as well as the energy and effort that goes into the meal.

3) Setting an inviting table. Even if it's a place set for one, make it special by using your best dinnerware, glass, cloth napkin, and adding flowers or a candle

Even if you cannot do these things due to lack of time or because you're not at home, commit to doing the following:

Remove Distractions

This means no TV in the background, no phone, devices, laptops, papers or books beside you. This is time for you and your meal.

Sit Down & Take a Moment to Appreciate your Food

Take a moment now to transition from whatever you've been doing up to this point in your day. By sitting down at a table, saying a prayer, or expressing gratitude to the person or yourself for preparing the food in front of you,

you create a simple but effective way to bring yourself into the present moment – the definition of mindfulness.

Engage Your Senses Again

Now that everything is ready don't fall into the routine of what we often do once we're ready to eat, and begin swallowing your food almost whole.

Before taking your first bite ask yourself:

- 1. How does my meal look?**
- 2. What can I smell?**
- 3. How does it feel when I place my fork into my food?**

Chew Each Mouthful Thoroughly

When we chew well (aim for at least 10 chews per mouthful) we slow down enough to not only savor and appreciate our food, and focus on the present moment, we also make the food easier to digest and the food's nutrients more efficiently and effectively absorbed. In turn, speeding up our metabolism.

Taking the time to reflect after each bite also means tuning in to how we're feeling: are we still hungry, or are we now pleasantly satisfied?

Put Down Your Fork Between Bites & Take Time to Reflect

By putting down your fork between bites, you help yourself to slow down and become more mindful. Which is important as it can take up to 20 minutes for your brain to register that you're full, and for you to tap into your hunger and satiation cues.

If You Find Your Mind Wandering

This is normal but you can train yourself to stay more and more in the present moment with tricks such as:

- Eating with your non-dominant hand
- Eating with chopsticks... nothing like these 2 ideas to slow you down if you're not used to using them!

Keep Practicing

Don't give up. The benefits of a better metabolism and a more gentle and appreciative relationship with food are so worth practicing the art of Mindful Eating.