

Experimenting With Mindful Eating

People's eating habits tend to be more mindless than mindful. The key to changing habits is experimenting to find what works for you, because not everything always works for everyone.

Try these mindful eating experiments over time, not necessarily all in the same meal, to find what works for you. There are no right or wrong answers; the point is for you to observe your experience, which can help you make more supportive choices as you become more skilled in mindful eating.

The Experiment: Eat What You Want

Consider what it is you really want to eat. Do you believe it is a “good” or “bad” food that you “should” or “shouldn’t” eat?

Take a bite of the food, then move it around in your mouth before you start to chew. Notice the taste, texture, and temperature. Then chew slowly.

If it is a “good” food, did you enjoy it? If not, is it really something that you like? If you don't, does eating what you don't like because it's “good” really feel good?

Does your definition of what's good to eat really work for you?

How does eating a “bad” food affect you? If it creates stress, try being neutral about it. It's just food. Does that change how you experience it? Do you want it as much—or as much of it—as you thought you did when you no longer think it's something you shouldn't eat?

The Experiment: Sit Down When Eating

Sit at a table or even your desk or the nearest chair before you begin to eat. Does this simple act make a difference in your ability to tune in as you eat?

The Experiment: Eat Until You Feel Satisfied

Begin eating only when you feel physically hungry. Pay close attention as you eat. At what point do you feel like the food stops tasting as good as the first bite? When do you feel your hunger go away? When do you feel as if you could stop and go for a few hours without getting hungry again? Do you feel full? If not, do you feel like you need to feel full before you stop? Why or why not?

The Experiment: Slowing Down

Put your eating utensils down between bites. How does this affect your eating?

Focus on the food in your mouth rather than the food you are planning to eat next. Does this make a difference in your eating?

Alternate eating with your nondominant hand. Does this work to help you slow down and pay more attention to eating?

Periodically pause during your meal to notice how hungry you still are and what you are thinking about. Is your mind on eating?

The Experiment: Focusing Before Eating

Take a few deep breaths before you decide what to eat. Even close your eyes or stare unfocused at nothing. How do you feel? Are you hungry? Are you anxious? Is what you feel like eating affected by your level of hunger or stress? Does the awareness of what you are feeling affect the choices you make?

Try taking three intentional breaths before eating. On the first, inhale the smells of your meal; exhale any tension you feel. On the second breath, inhale the intention to eat in a way that feels good during and after the meal; exhale any judgments about food or eating. On the third breath, inhale relaxation. Then exhale worries and begin to eat. How does this affect your eating experience?

Understand that even people who are highly skilled in mindful eating sometimes eat mindlessly. Don't worry about being perfect. When you find what works for you, practice the strategies regularly so that mindful eating becomes a habit.

— *Source: Marsha Hudnall, MS, RDN, CD*