

MODULE 8 ACTIVITY

Mindful Eating

Practicing mindful eating has numerous benefits. First, it increases our awareness of our own hunger cues, which can improve our ability to eat to satiation but without overconsuming. In addition, it can help us be aware of our personal habits and foods that “call” to us more frequently than others.

Second, it increases our enjoyment of food. Food is, after all, a basic pleasure and mindful eating can help us reconnect with that pleasure even amid internal thoughts about what you “should” eat.

Lastly, it can encourage exploration. For a lot of individuals, many foods that are considered more nutritious and better for producing a healthy mind-gut connection are simply not appetizing at first. However, some of that may be related to judgments they have about those foods—judgments they have learned from others, media, or other sources. Mindful eating pushes past those judgments and encourages exploration.

Part 1: Mindfully Eating Chocolate

This activity will take 3-4 minutes. This can be individually but is also great with your practice partner/team.

Grab a piece of chocolate. If you do not have one, do not like chocolate, or cannot eat chocolate for medical reasons, find another piece of candy, fruit, or sweet treat. Eliminate any distractions you might have. Set aside your phone. Close any browsers on your computer if they are open. Turn off music.

- **Consider the outside of the food. What color is it? If it is a wrapper of some kind, what does it say? Where did it come from?**
- **Do you feel a sense of anticipation, or an urge to immediately eat the food? What physical sensations do you have? What emotions are you feeling? Just note them.**
- **Feel the food. Consider its texture and weight.**
- **Smell the food. Does the smell trigger any other senses? Where do you feel your sense of smell?**
- **Place the chocolate in your mouth but do not eat it. How does it feel? Where in your mouth can you taste it? What is the consistency? What is happening with your mouth, teeth, tongue?**

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- Move the food around your mouth. Does the area of taste change? Does the taste itself change? What is happening to the food? How do you feel?
- Swallow the food, focusing on the sensation. Is there a lingering taste? How do you feel physically and emotionally? Take a little while to consider the experience.

Answer the following questions or discuss with your practice partner or team:

How was this different from your usual eating experiences?

Was there a part that was more intense? Was it frustrating at some point, or pleasurable?

Were you more aware of your emotions during the exercise? Will this change your future experience of eating that food item? Why?

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To summarize, here are five tips for continued practice with mindful eating:

1. Calm yourself. Refrain from eating while distracted or on the go.
2. Look at your plate. Notice everything you can see and smell about the plate and notice how it changes as you eat.
3. Chew food completely and slowly. This changes the food composition in our mouths, which can release flavors as you eat. It also helps with digestion.
4. Put your food down. Slow down with a pause after each bite. If you use a utensil, put it down after a bite.
5. Reflect on how you feel right after eating. This will help you dial in foods that are better for you and more enjoyable, and maybe even expand your palate.

Part 2: Expanding Your Palate

This is an optional challenge. Select an ingredient, food, meal, or even cuisine that you would normally avoid. Eat that food mindfully and notice how your reactions change. Then, consider whether you will continue to consume this food item.

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