Mindful Eating: A New Experience with Food

Mindful eating is the practice of enjoying food with understanding and self-compassion. It brings awareness to food choice and the experience of eating without judgment or guilt and helps us be more conscious about what we are eating and why. Mindful eating helps us reconnect with our inner signals about hunger and fullness.

Mindful eating is more about how we eat rather than what we eat. It does not label foods as "good" or "bad," but instead focuses on physical hunger cues and how you engage in eating, paying close attention to all of your senses. By doing so, your attention is on your food, not other distractions, increasing the likelihood you are satisfied by the overall experience of eating.

The practice of mindful eating is something you can do at any time, and it helps create or maintain a healthy relationship with food. Consider these tips for being a more mindful eater.

- **Notice your food.**
    - Before you take a bite of a meal or snack, take a moment to examine your food. How much is there? What ingredients are included? What does the food smell like? Imagine you are a food critic and are describing your food to someone else.
- **Slow down.**
    - So often we eat on the go or eat quickly to move on to the next task. Slow the pace of eating and take time to enjoy your food. Pay attention to the texture and flavor of the food. Take a break between bites or try to chew more slowly. It can take 20 minutes or more for your stomach to signal your brain that you are full. By slowing down, you'll be more likely to recognize when you are physically full and allow for better digestion, which can help break the cycle of overeating or over-restriction.
- **Limit distractions.**
    - It can be easy to turn on the TV or scroll through social media on your phone while you eat, but this prevents us from connecting with our food. The same can be said for eating lunch at your desk. If your mind is preoccupied, this can interfere with the amount of food you eat without even realizing it.
- **Consider your body.**
    - Pay attention to how the food you're eating makes you feel. Does the food give you energy? Does it make you feel sluggish? Remember, all foods can be part of a balanced diet. Choose foods that are pleasing to you but also nourishing for your body.

Research tells us mindful eating is also beneficial for overall health and wellness. Over time, improvements can be seen in self-esteem, reduced stress levels, diabetes self-management, and weight management. Mindful eating takes practice, but by focusing on how you are eating instead of just what or how much, you'll enjoy your food more.

Reference:

Fung, T., Long, M., Hung, P., & Cheung, L. (2016). An Expanded Model for Mindful Eating for Health Promotion and Sustainability: Issues and Challenges for Dietetics Practice. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 116*(7), 1081-1086.

Source:

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