



Mindful Eating

You know that feeling when you are driving down the highway and you completely zone out and do not know how you arrived at your destination? Or have you been watching TV and eating a bag of chips, only to find that you go to grab another chip and the whole bag has been eaten without you realizing it? This is called “mindless” behavior and it happens a lot around eating.

“Mindless eating” has been linked to overeating, stress and increased anxiety.

How would you know if you are eating in a mindless or distracted way? One quick way is to recall what you ate at your last meal. Can you describe the flavor, the taste, the texture? If you are struggling to remember any of the specifics about your choice, you may be mindlessly eating.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is deliberately paying attention with non-judgment. It encompasses both internal processes and external environments and is being aware of what is present for you mentally, emotionally and physically in each moment. Mindfulness promotes balance, choice, wisdom, and acceptance of what is.

Mindful eating is about being in the present moment—giving your body what it needs—and coming back to the PHYSIOLOGICAL senses of eating (Smelling, tasting, chewing, swallowing) while not ignoring but accepting the emotional feelings that come along with that.

Mindful eating can help with emotional eating, bingeing, and other health issues related to food—but weight-loss is not a goal in this process.

Your weight will naturally sit where it feels comfortable—called your “set-point” weight—when you improve your relationship with food through mindful eating.

Mindful Eating Is...

- Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive opportunities that are available through food preparation and consumption by respecting and honoring where the food came from.
- Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body by using all your senses to explore, savor and taste. Think about what the food is doing for your body, physically AND emotionally.
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, neutral or dislikes) without judgment. Do not let yourself become the food police! If negative thoughts around food come into your head, try to let them go.

If you feel negative thoughts often surrounding your eating, you may want to access counseling services available on campus.

- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating. Become familiar with the Hunger Scale. Guidance from our nutrition educator/counselor can help you do this.

Someone Who Eats Mindfully...

- Acknowledges that there is no right or wrong way to eat but varying degrees of awareness surrounding the experience of food.
- Accepts that their eating experiences are unique, overeating and undereating are part of the process.
- Is aware of and reflects on the effects caused by unmindful eating but does not judge one-self for eating unmindfully rather just acknowledges it happened.
- Becomes aware of the interconnection of the Earth, living beings, and cultural practices and the impact of your food choices has on those systems.
- Is an individual who by choice, directs their awareness to all aspects of food and eating on a moment-by-moment basis. Follow the sensations of the plate:



Mindful Eating in College

You may have to use a little imagination at the dining halls or at home, but here's a step by step process:

- Set up your plate with utensils as you would at a nice dinner. Make your plate look enticing. Increasing enjoyment in the appearance of your food makes it easier.
- Listen to some soft music on your music player/phone if it helps you to concentrate.
- EAT SLOWLY. Notice how you chew and swallow. Take breaths between bites and put down utensils while chewing.
- Check in with your hunger cues mid-way through the meal—how much more do you have to eat to be full?
- The Okinawan's of Japan, describe fullness as your stomach feeling 75% full, you feel as you can eat more but are satisfied not to.
- If you find yourself at 75% full stop eating whether your plate is finished or not. Practicing leaving a bite or two of food on the plate helps you to get over the “clean plate habit”. If you finish your plate and are not 75% full, go back and get more food and continue the steps above.
- Try not to judge what you are eating or what you ate. Be present in the moment—don't “live” in the past or future. If you feel these judgmental thoughts are affecting your eating, seek our help by talking with a professional at [Health & Wellness](#) or [Psychological and Counseling Services \(PACS\)](#).

Resources for Mindful Eating

- [Nutrition Counseling at Health & Wellness](#)
- [Nourish UNH Nutrition Peer Education](#)
- [The Center for Mindful Eating](#)
- [Health at Every Size](#)
- [Mindful: 6 Ways to Practice Mindful Eating](#)