

Can mindful eating help lower risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease?

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Given the high stress levels, extended periods of screen time and regular social outings many Americans experience day-to-day in environments where high-calorie foods are readily available, it can be easy to fall into the habit of mindless eating - where we're too distracted to pay attention to how much, what and why we're eating. Research suggests that practicing mindfulness - or taking the time to bring awareness to present-moment experiences with an open attitude of curiosity and non-judgment - can be effective in allowing us to make more thoughtful food choices and recognize when we are hungry, satisfied or full. The latest research in this area led by Jennifer Daubenmier, PhD, Assistant Professor at the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, suggests that the impact of mindful eating could be even greater.

"Whether eating snacks while watching the game or grazing by the dessert tray at the office event, we often find ourselves overeating not because we're hungry, but because the food looks delicious, we're distracted, or we wish to soothe away unpleasant feelings," explains Dr. Daubenmier. "Our study suggests that mindful eating can go further than making [healthy food choices](#) and recognizing when we're full; it could improve glucose levels and heart health to a greater extent than behavioral weight-loss programs that do not teach [mindful eating](#)."

Dr. Daubenmier and her colleagues evaluated the effects of a mindfulness-based weight-loss intervention on adults with obesity, and although no statistically significant differences in weight loss were found

compared to the [control group](#), the mindfulness intervention showed greater improvements in certain cardiometabolic outcomes tied to Type 2 Diabetes and cardiovascular disease up to one year after the intervention ended. The research is published in the March issue of *Obesity*, the scientific journal of The Obesity Society.

To conduct the study, the researchers randomized nearly 200 adults with obesity to a mindfulness intervention or an active attention control group over a five-and-a-half month period, with a subsequent one-year follow up. Both groups were given identical diet and exercise guidelines. Participants in the mindfulness intervention received added training on [mindfulness meditation](#) and how to practice awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations during eating and exercise. At 18 months after the start of the intervention, participants in the mindfulness program lost an estimated 4.3% of body weight on average, which was 3.7 pounds more than those in the control group but not enough to reach statistical significance. Nevertheless, the authors found that the mindfulness program had more positive effects on fasting blood glucose at 18 months and a ratio of triglycerides to HDL-cholesterol levels at 12 months (a difference of -4.1 mg/dL and -0.57, respectively), both of which are linked to Type 2 Diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

"Most behavioral weight-loss interventions do not place as much emphasis on managing [mindless eating](#), and previous studies on the topic have not included attention controls or long term follow-up to better study the contribution of mindfulness components over time," said Deborah Tate, PhD, spokesperson for The Obesity Society. "This research points to some of the potential benefits of enhancing the [mindfulness](#) components of behavioral weight loss."

Provided by Wiley

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