

Mindful eating helps to lose weight—and keep it off

April 21 2016, by Mallory Powell

Losing weight is difficult, and keeping it off can be even harder. Many people regain the weight because typical weight loss diets involve drastic, unsustainable changes. Alternatively, learning to eat "mindfully" can fundamentally shift our relationship with food for long-term weight loss maintenance.

In our busy, convenience-oriented lives, eating has become an [automatic behavior](#). Research shows we make more than 200 eating decisions daily, but we sometimes don't take time to think about them. Instead, we often eat mindlessly, or out of habit. In a culture where we are surrounded by unhealthy food options, this has understandably led to a lot of [weight](#) gain.

Mindfulness means paying [attention](#), on purpose, to the present moment—without placing judgment. Mindfulness-based approaches have been used with success in the treatment of health issues like stress, depression, eating disorders and chronic pain. When we apply mindfulness to eating, it helps us support our long-term health and wellbeing, because we learn to slow down and recognize when we're truly hungry and when we've had enough to eat.

It's not about meditating over breakfast—but about continually paying attention to how food affects us, so that we can make better eating choices. With gentle and attentive practice, we can reprogram the behaviors and reactions that cause us to eat mindlessly. This can lead to lasting changes from to how we react when there's food in social

situations to how we shop for and prepare food.

It might seem daunting to learn eat mindfully, but with practice it can become a habit. Here are few tips and resources to get started:

- Before you eat, stop and ask yourself why you're eating. Is your body actually hungry?
- Your stomach is about the size of your clenched fist, so try to [eat](#) just that amount at one time. It actually takes 20 minutes for the brain to recognize that you are full, so try to wait before getting a second helping.
- Pay attention to physical signs of hunger and fullness. Eat when you're slightly hungry (not starving), and stop when you don't feel hungry anymore (not full or stuffed).
- Take time to look at your food, smell your food, and taste your food more slowly to really experience it.
- Minimize distractions (like screens) while eating. Sit down and focus your attention only on your [food](#) and your body.

More information: The Mindful Diet from Duke Integrative Medicine: [www.dukeintegrativemedicine.org ... ch/the-mindful-diet/](http://www.dukeintegrativemedicine.org/ch/the-mindful-diet/)

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