

5 Habits of Mindful Eating

*An effective method of improving
our relationship with food*



What Is Mindful Eating?

Mindful eating is a simple method of becoming hyper-focused on the present moment, and being aware of your senses while eating food. It can help manage eating habits, and make people feel better about their body.

The purpose is not counting calories, or tracking macros (carbohydrates, fat, or protein), and mindful eating has little to do with weight loss, although it is proven to help with losing weight. The intention is to help individuals understand and enjoy the food they eat, and remove stresses associated with overeating unhealthy foods. Mindful eating can be a fun way to make meal times social, or a time to reflect and savour the moment as a solo experience.

Benefits of Mindful Eating

There is much research associated with the benefits of mindful eating, most notably the pioneering works of Jon Kabat-Zinn (leader of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School). The mindful eating method helps us understand why 'diets' aren't effective in the long-term...Simply put, diets fail to focus on behaviour change.

Since its introduction into dietary behaviour change programming, mindful eating has become a successful strategy that improves individual success.

Some of the key benefits include:

- Reduced gas and bloating after meals
- Reduced binge-eating
- Reduced stress-eating and anxiety
- Improved digestion
- Improved self-control around foods
- Improved nutritional intake
- Improved weight loss results



Habit 1: Try The Raisin Exercise

The raisin exercise is a good starting point for mindful eating. It's a sensual food experience that helps tune sight, touch, smell, and taste; becoming fully aware of the moment. This exercise is designed to introduce your senses into the act of eating, helping you savour and experience the foods you eat.

Give it a try:

Take a raisin and hold it in the palm of your hand or between your finger and thumb.

Sight: Take time to really focus on it; gaze at the raisin with care and full attention—imagine that you're an alien from outer space, and have never seen anything like this before in your life. Let your eyes explore every part of it, examining the shape, colour, texture, and any imperfections.

Touch: Move the raisin around between your fingers, feeling the texture. Try this with your eyes closed to enhance your sense of touch. Is it hard, soft, sticky, dry? Does it make a sound as it moves between your fingers? Notice what you are feeling about this object.

Smell: Hold the raisin near your nose. Inhale the aroma and notice how your body reacts.

Taste: Place the raisin between your lips and just hold it there for a few seconds. How does that make you react? Move it into your mouth, but don't chew yet...is there a taste? What's happening inside your mouth? How does that make you feel?

Finally, slowly begin to chew, noticing what each bite feels, and taste like. Move it around your mouth. Chew the raisin into mush before you swallow. How does it feel as the raisin travels to your stomach?

Sense how your body as a whole is feeling after you have completed this exercise.



Habit 2: Just Ask “Why?”

The human body creates many prompts to tell us when to take action. One of these prompts can be described as a ‘rumbly stomach’ or ‘hunger pangs’, which tells us that we are hungry, and our body needs more energy. If we don’t respond to the natural ‘hunger’ prompts we may experience low blood sugar levels and feel unwell. Because hunger is a physical feeling, we can satisfy the prompts easily with any type of food source.

However, things become complicated when our psyche gets involved. Psychological hunger, as it is known, pushes us towards snacking and overeating. It comes from the emotional desire to eat, with no physical signs that your body needs energy.

This is associated with cravings, boredom and emotional eating. Research suggests that boredom is the most common reason for psychological hunger. Why do you think cinemas sell popcorn and other snacks? To entertain you through the boring parts of a movie!

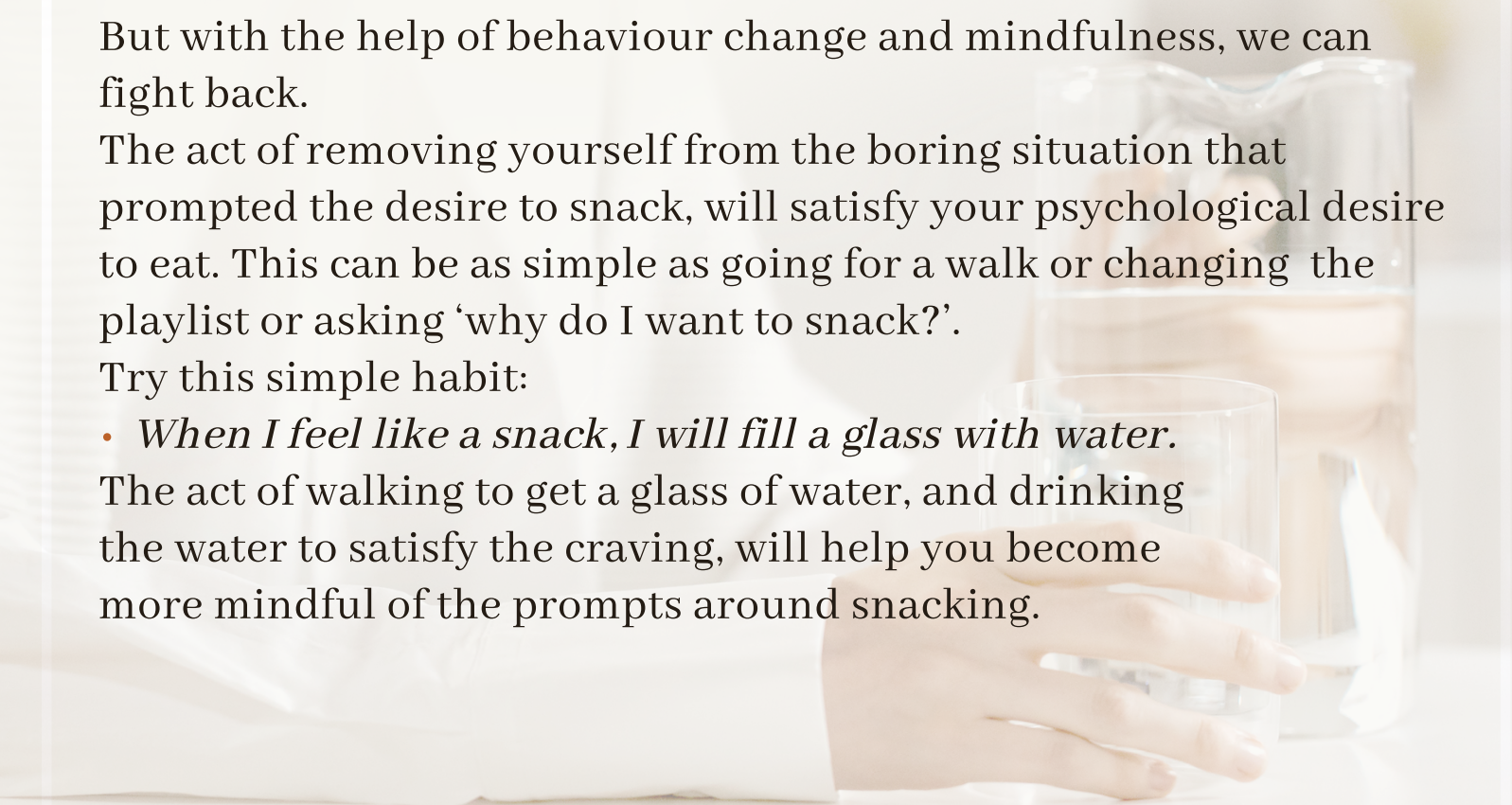
But with the help of behaviour change and mindfulness, we can fight back.

The act of removing yourself from the boring situation that prompted the desire to snack, will satisfy your psychological desire to eat. This can be as simple as going for a walk or changing the playlist or asking ‘why do I want to snack?’.

Try this simple habit:

- *When I feel like a snack, I will fill a glass with water.*

The act of walking to get a glass of water, and drinking the water to satisfy the craving, will help you become more mindful of the prompts around snacking.



Habit 3: Slow Down

After you start eating it can take up to 20 minutes for your body to decode the signs of fullness. Slowing down when consuming food will allow enough time for your gut and brain to communicate. This will also help reduce overeating and aid in better digestion.

Here are our top picks for a more satisfying feed:

Set a timer - Before you begin dinner in the evening, set a timer on your phone for 20 minutes. Take a few deep breaths to center yourself and try to take 20 minutes to eat your meal.

Relax, and focus on your food.

Pause - If you find it difficult to sit down and make a meal last for a whole 20 minutes, put your fork down between each bite.

Swapping the fork for chopsticks can help you slow down, too.

If you still struggle to pause, leave the table to fetch a glass of water. Or step outside and take three deep breaths, then return to your meal.

Chew for 20 - Chewing breaks down food into smaller pieces.

This aids in better, easier digestion – making us feel fuller quicker. In the first 5 minutes of your meal, take smaller bites than usual and try to chew 20 times before swallowing.

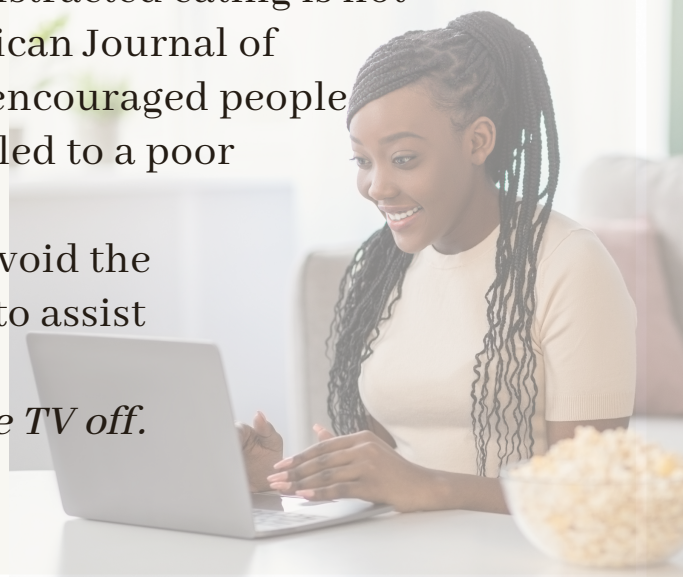


Habit 4: Remove Distractions

Whether it's wolfing down subway in the car or crunching on chips while watching YouTube in your lunch break, distracted eating is not uncommon. A review of 24 studies by The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that distracted eating encouraged people to consume more food throughout the day, and led to a poor relationship with eating.

Applying the mindful eating principle, we can avoid the distraction trap. Try one of these simple habits to assist in a distraction free eating experience:

- *When I finish plating up dinner, I will turn the TV off.*
- *When I sit down to eat dinner, I will turn my phone onto airplane mode.*



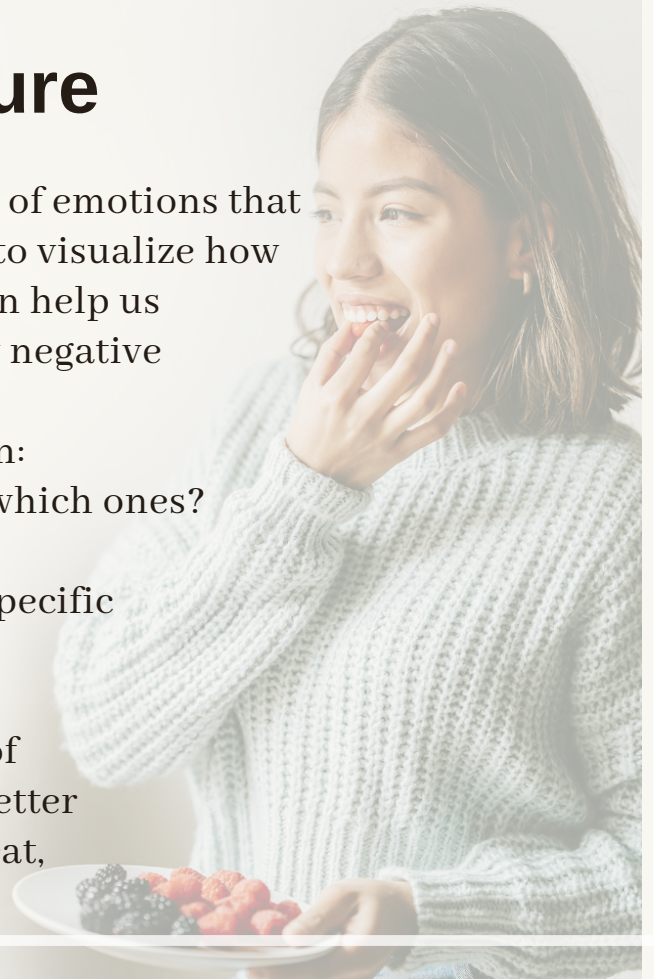
Habit 5: Predict The Future

Mindful eating can help you understand the types of emotions that surround your relationship with food. Being able to visualize how we might feel after a meal, before it's happened, can help us connect better with the food we eat, and avoid any negative feelings.

Before you start eating, ask yourself these questions:

- Will eating this food evoke any emotions? If so, which ones?
- Why do you think these emotions are surfacing?
- Are you eating to satisfy hunger or cope with a specific emotion or issue in your day?
- Will this meal feel nourishing? If not, why?

The goal of this activity is to become more aware of your emotional responses to food and develop a better understanding of how feelings can affect how we eat, not just what we eat.



Sources And Further Reading:

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- An Exploratory Study of a Meditation-based Intervention for Binge Eating Disorder:
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- Today's Dietitian - Mindful Eating — Studies Show This Concept Can Help Clients Lose Weight and Better Manage Chronic Disease
<https://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/030413p42.shtml>
- Eating when bored: revision of the emotional eating scale with a focus on boredom:
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