



Food *for* Thought

A quarterly newsletter from The Center for Mindful Eating

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Welcome to The Center for Mindful Eating

TCME is a member-supported forum for professionals interested in understanding the value of mindful eating. TCME identifies and provides resources for individuals who wish to help their clients develop healthier relationships with food and eating, and bring eating into balance with other important aspects of life. Mindfulness practices have been shown to have a positive impact on many disease states and health concerns, and mindfulness approaches are increasingly being applied to eating and food choice. The benefits of mindful eating are not restricted to physical health improvement alone. Practitioners may find that mindfulness and mindful eating can affect one's entire life. The Center for Mindful Eating does not promote a singular approach to mindful eating but is committed to fostering dialogue and the sharing of ideas, clinical experience, and research.



www.tcme.org

About This Issue

The experience of fullness is unique to each person. In this issue of Food for Thought, we tackle the concept of fullness and how educating our clients about this foundational understanding can help them enjoy the process of eating and food more. Brian Shelley, M.D., and Jean Kristeller, Ph.D., offer four techniques and discussion points to present to clients regarding the experience of fullness. Megrette Fletcher, M.Ed., RD, CDE, offers a hunger/fullness scale that can be used in a counseling session. This article has been made into a patient handout to help you introduce the topic to clients. To access, click on Newsletter on the TCME website.

We express our gratitude to the many individuals who have become members of TCME over the past year. Their tax-deductible donations allow us to continue to provide valuable services. Visit www.tcme.org and explore our current offerings. If you are not a member, please consider joining.

The Near Side of Fullness

By Brian M. Shelley, M.D.

Doesn't it make some sense that we would want to be full? After all, it can feel good to be well nourished. But does fullness actually feel good? Most people seeking help with challenging eating habits usually feel awful after overeating. On the physical level, they often report feeling bloated. On the cognitive-emotional level, fullness is often followed by self-loathing and recrimination. So, in fact, fullness is not necessarily synonymous with satisfaction.

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On the other hand, the thoughts of hunger and physical emptiness strike terror in us. We avoid this situation with great vigor. We'll do almost anything to avoid an empty stomach and the feeling of deprivation that often accompanies it. Yet, in reality, when people's stomachs are "empty," they often report that they enjoy it. They feel light, energized, and that their mental faculties are sharper. So, often, an empty stomach is not necessarily synonymous with feeling deprived.

As professionals, it is important to try to help clients shatter these myths about hunger, emptiness and fullness through direct experience. We need to help clients learn to mindfully investigate the true nature of our appetites, to go beyond information about micro-nutrients and calories.

Sometimes the best way to develop awareness of something is to start at its opposite. For example, progressive relaxation is an effective way for people to begin to reduce physical and psychological tension. As people learn this technique, they first *contract* a set of muscles in order to become aware of them. After this, they release and relax those same muscles. Likewise, we can increase awareness of fullness by investigating *hunger* and *emptiness*. From there, we can move slowly and consciously toward



investigating the feelings and sensations of fullness.

One of our mindful eating classes focuses on this method. Participants are instructed a week in advance to come to the next class feeling mildly hungry, if possible. They are asked to try to avoid extreme hunger (to the point of pain or hypoglycemia), but to refrain from eating only to the point at which they are easily aware of their hunger. Many participants find this challenging since it involves disruptions to normal eating habits and usually involves skipping a meal or eating earlier than usual. In this exercise, there is no need to question whether the hunger is real or where it is felt most acutely. The whole body is included in the field of awareness to help recognize hunger and any feelings of distress. In the classroom, a variety of foods are laid out buffet-style. After engaging in a brief sitting meditation, participants are asked to silently estimate how much food they will need to eat to satisfy their

hunger. Then they approach the buffet and serve themselves this amount of food. People are encouraged to eat mindfully: to eat one bite of food, to notice the eating experience and to pay specific attention to the impact of each mouthful on feelings of emptiness, hunger or distress. They continue eating, one bite at a time, and notice what happens. People are encouraged to continue eating, slowly, staying present for the transition from emptiness and hunger to the beginning of satiety, contentment or fullness.

Individuals have different responses to this exercise. The majority of participants, however, come to similar conclusions.

1. *Being hungry is not as dreadful as it was expected to be.* Of course, we are talking about a mild hunger only, with food readily available. Yet most people are pleasantly surprised by this, and it reduces some of the anxiety people feel at the prospect of modestly restricting their caloric intake.

2. *Satiety comes sooner than expected, long before fullness.* Usually, just a few mouthfuls of food have a profoundly calming effect on the distressing feeling of hunger. Most participants have a lot of food on their plate when they realize it is time to stop eating. In other words, most people overestimate the amount of food they need to feel satisfied. Without this direct experience, the extra food on their plates would most likely be eaten.

3. *The moment of satiety is subtle and fleeting, yet detectable.* Distractions such as looking at other people, talking, reading, listening to the radio, and watching TV can cause us to miss the onset of satiety, which arises well before total fullness. If we miss it, we are at risk for eating until we are full and distressed. Most people are excited to know, however, that they can still detect and respond to physiological cues. All that is needed is mindful attention.

Please see Jean Kristeller's other practice suggestions related to fullness later in this issue.

Brian M. Shelley MD, is a board member of TCME. He is also Wellness Director at First Choice Community Healthcare in Albuquerque, NM. He can be contacted directly at bshelley@salud.unm.edu.

Finding Fullness

By Megrette Fletcher, M.Ed., RD., CDE

What would happen if you always knew when to stop eating? You could sense when you had eaten enough food and simply put your fork down. Take a moment and think: Would this ability improve your health?

If you believe that stopping eating when you are comfortably full will help your health, then consider using the following hunger / fullness scale. This tool can be helpful to discover a comfortable level of fullness when eating.

The rating scale above is divided into three sections. Numbers 10-7 is when either hunger or fullness is

(Hunger) **10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Fullness)

painful and unpleasant, 6-4 is when hunger or fullness is comfortable, and 3-1 is when hunger or fullness is slightly noticeable.

Between hunger and fullness is the number zero, and this is the most important number to notice when

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finding fullness. Zero is the point when you are neither hungry nor full. It is also the moment in eating where you can shift your intent from satisfying hunger to finding fullness.

When you come to this point, put your fork down and silently tell yourself, "When I am comfortably full, I will stop eating." As you prepare to exit the meal, slow down after each bite and check in continuously with your belly. The ability to recognize the absence of hunger is enhanced by slowing down at mealtime, reducing eating distractions, and intentionally

noticing and rating current physical sensations like fullness.

You may notice that once you have satisfied your acute hunger, the taste of food changes. It may still taste good; however, the amount of enjoyment you receive from each bite is less and less until finally eating is no longer pleasurable.

In fact, eating past a comfortable level of fullness becomes painful, both physically and emotionally.

The ability to find a comfortable level of fullness is a skill that you were born with. It can be reclaimed as you become more aware of the physical body cues of fullness and hunger. In doing so, a new sense of health and well-being is created by not overeating and is enjoyed after the meal.

Megrette Fletcher, M.Ed., RD., CDE, is a co-founder of TCME, author, dietitian and diabetes educator and contributes to a number of mindful eating blogs, including www.resourcesformindfuleating.com



Mindfully Tuning in to Fullness

By Jean Kristeller, Ph.D.

Eating out of balance often involves overeating, whether it's a matter of always clearing your plate, finishing the leftovers or the bag of chips or getting caught up in a binge. Tuning in to feelings of fullness is a core element of eating mindfully.

Within the MB-EAT program, we help people cultivate a greater awareness of internal feelings of fullness in several ways. We first introduce this within the group by having participants drink a large amount (16-20 oz.) of water as a way to increase a sense of fullness in the stomach. Using water has several advantages. First, it's practical in a treatment setting since it doesn't require any

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preparation and there is no issue with food preferences. Second, it removes anxiety about eating a substantial amount of food in front of others. Third, it separates fullness awareness from hunger awareness because water does not affect hunger in any physiologically meaningful way.

As individuals drink from their bottle of water, we ask them to tune in to feelings of fullness, rated on a 10-point scale (1 = not full at all; 10 = as full as one could possibly feel). We emphasize that there is no right or wrong number or right or wrong level of fullness,

but that everyone needs to interpret his or her own experience and notice the feelings that accompany the number chosen. Home practice involves applying this inner awareness fullness scale during meals and snacks over the following week – and, of course, from there on.

We also emphasize that there is no “right” level of fullness – a light snack creates a different feeling than a large family holiday dinner – but that checking in on feelings of fullness provides an important source of feedback from the body and a powerful link to “inner wisdom.”

Jean Kristeller, Ph.D., is a TCME board member and professor of psychology at Indiana State University. See www.indstate.edu/psychology/faculty/clinical_faculty for related publications, or e-mail JKristeller@indstate.edu.

Our Mission

*TCME is a nonprofit, nonreligious organization whose purpose is to incorporate mindful eating into new and existing programs. We offer a variety of resources, including *The Principles of Mindful Eating*, which is available at our Web site and is free for reproduction for educational purposes.*

TCME is a member-supported organization. JOIN TODAY!

\$40 Professional Membership: *Learn more about mindful eating and ways to bring this wisdom into your daily work. Become a member today! See our Web site or application for details.*

\$25 Student Membership: *TCME welcomes individuals who are enrolled in a degree-granting program to learn more about mindful eating. Verification of current enrollment required. See Web site or application for details.*

TCME
The Center for Mindful Eating

P.O.Box 88

West Nottingham NH
03291

603-778-5841

info@tcme.org