

Food *for* Thought

A quarterly newsletter from The Center for Mindful Eating

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Your \$40 TCME membership is how TCME is funded. We appreciate your tax deductible donation.

Winter 2011

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.

About This Issue

Teaching individuals about the power of the pause has never been more important than now. In this issue of Food for Thought, we explore how slowing down, pausing and being present with the bite has many unexpected benefits. Gretchen Newmark, MA, RD, and Jan Chozen Bays, M.D., share how savoring a bite actually lets you reconnect to the pleasure in food. Donald Altman, MA, offers some ideas on how to slow down when eating with other people. 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 Pause

By Gretchen Newmark, MA, RD, LD

John Lennon said, *Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans*. With eating, this might be rephrased, "Eating is what happens while we are busy taking the next bite and thinking of our next activity."

"Remembering to pause is creating a different habit. It is a mindfulness practice in the mouth and mind."

Pausing is one of the skills of mindfulness. Taking the time to savor is what gives us the opportunity to actually experience life with our senses, savor and reflect on it, rather than just hurrying through without taking it in. It is possible to eat an entire meal or more without ever actually

having tasted it, or even noticed that we are eating it! Even with the most delicious food, we can have an unconscious habit of eating so quickly and mindlessly that we receive little of the pleasure from it.

If you observe people eating you might notice that often they are taking a bite before they have chewed and swallowed the previous bite. Often people appear to be eating as fast as they possibly can, as if there weren't enough food to be had, or they are in an eating contest. If we eat in that way, we are often eating more and more just to try to get satisfaction that we could find more easily by pausing to taste the bite that is in our mouth. It is a waste of experience, and is a metaphor for the kind of mindless living that John Lennon described.

The pace and style with which we eat are habits and eating habits are not easy to change. Remembering to pause is creating a different habit. It is a mindfulness practice in the mouth and mind. Here are a few suggestions that can help us remember to pause and notice our food. We can change the environment in which we eat. If we usually eat in a certain place, in a certain manner, we can experiment with change. For example, if we would typically stand or drive while eating, we could try sitting. If we usually eat from a large plate, we might try a beautiful bowl or smaller plate.

We might sit at a table in a different room with a pretty place mat or tablecloth and flowers. We could try turning off the TV or computer to see if that helps us pause and experience our food. We might even put a note to ourselves where we eat, "Pause!" A wonderful pause at any time is to stop, take a full breath, tune in and notice what is happening that very moment inside and outside our mind and body.

Pausing is also an important way to check in with what our body has to say before, during and after the meal. The pleasant, subtle



sensation of hunger, before we are starved, is difficult to notice if we are distracted and not noticing our body and mind. For many people, the first "sensation" of hunger is the mind beginning to think about food. If we are attending to too many things at once, or if we feel pressured for time, we might not notice our body's need for food until we are so hungry that it is hard to stop once we do start eating. Satiety or satisfaction is also a subtle signal. Unlike feeling too full, satiety is difficult to notice if we are not tuned in to our

body's signals. Pausing to check what the body is feeling as we eat is a good way to discover when it becomes satisfied.

Sometimes people don't want to check in with their bodies because they don't want to have to stop eating if their body is satisfied. It's important to disconnect pausing and noticing from any idea of what we think we are supposed to do in response. If we think, "If I feel satisfied I have to stop eating right now," we may not want to pause and notice. Sometimes when a food is very tasty, we might decide to eat past the point of satisfaction. Pausing to notice how that feels enables us to experience what it feels like to be too full, and whether being over-full diminishes the pleasure of the food. Give yourself permission to pause and notice without some kind of mandate about what you are obligated to do in response.

Helping people with disordered eating, in my practice, I find that often when people read or hear about mindful eating, they turn it into just another diet. They think that they are now "supposed" to eat every meal slowly, from a little bowl with chopsticks, without conversation, TV or other distractions; and that they "have" to wait to start until they are hungry and "must" stop the moment they notice satiety. Mindful eating then becomes just another set of external diet rules—rather than an invitation to

increased enjoyment. People can become resistant to mindful eating when they make it feel oppressive. It is completely possible to pause and notice our food and bodies regardless of what other activities we are doing while we eat. But it takes practice, and in the beginning, it is easier to learn to notice subtle phenomena if we give ourselves the opportunity to eat free of distractions at least a few times so that we can learn how to tune into our experience of eating. Eventually we will become better at pausing even when our attention is divided. We might also become better at being compassionate with ourselves if we have eaten more than the body needs. Mindful eating is not meant to be another harsh source of “ought”s and “shoulds.”

Pausing is a gift of life we give to ourselves. It is pausing that allows us to appreciate the sound of children playing or leaves in the wind. It enables us to relish the rich moments of closeness or laughter we enjoy with other people. It means we can exuberantly dine rather than merely eat. To be truly nourished physically and spiritually, we slow down, breathe and pay attention so that our life doesn't just happen to us. We pause and take the time to actually live it.

Gretchen Newmark, MA, RD, LD, is a Registered Dietitian and spiritual director in private practice in Portland, Ore., with over 30 years' experience in meditation and yoga. Contact her at www.gretchennewmark.com.

Slowing Down When Eating With Others

By Donald Altman, M.A., LPC

It's easy to get mindless when eating in social situations. Eating at a party, with family members, or at holiday gatherings can trigger strong emotional feelings. Eating with “food pushers” who constantly try to make you eat more food can be unpleasant, to say the least. Fortunately, there are four mindfulness skills that can help you manage these and other challenging situations: pausing, pacing, slowing down, and being flexible.



1) Slow down. Get grounded before socializing. Spend a few moments to center yourself before entering a party or sitting down at the dinner table. Take some long, satisfying diaphragmatic breaths to reduce your stress or anxiety level. Combine this with a little stretching, such as rolling your

head in a circle or rolling your shoulders to lessen tension.

2) Pace your eating. This means checking in with your hunger. It helps to rate your hunger on a 1-10 scale (1 the least, 10 the most). If your hunger is in the 7-10 range, eat some food in advance. This way it will be easier for you to eat moderately and pace yourself.

3) Pause while eating. Find ways to take a moment of rest. Put down your fork or spoon. Take a few breaths. Use this time to be attentive to others and to check in with your hunger level. To guard against “food pushers,” learn to place smaller portions on your plate at any time. Give yourself permission to say “No, thank you” to more food.

4) Be flexible. Remember that you don't have to be perfect when eating with others. No one is a “perfect” eater. There are no “perfect” foods. With pacing, pausing and slowing down, you can mindfully navigate social eating challenges while also enjoying the food and the company.

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Slow Down When Eating

By Jan Chozen Bays, M.D.

One of the simplest ways to get more enjoyment out of eating while eating more appropriate amounts of food is to deliberately slow down. Our digestive system sends “satiety” signals to our brain when we’ve had enough to eat. These signals take about 20 minutes after we begin eating to be activated.

Americans are speedy eaters. Beginning in the elementary school lunchroom, we consume our meals in about ten minutes. This means our body doesn’t have a chance to give us “feedback” about how much food is the right amount. We can easily eat too much food too quickly. Because there isn’t time to release the satiety hormones, we also miss

pleasant sensation of satisfaction after our meal.

There are some simple ways to slow down your eating. Try taking a small first portion and



deliberately eating it slowly, with full attention to the flavor and texture. Avoid “layering”; don’t put in additional bites of food on top of previous ones. Try putting

down the fork or spoon between bites, and don’t pick it back up until the food in your mouth is savored and swallowed. Check in with the sensations in your stomach a few times during the

meal to see how full it is feeling. Ordinarily, our food seems to lose flavor after the first bite. When you slow down, however, pausing between bites, you will discover that each bite retains that “first bite” flavor. Your body also has a chance to register a sense of satisfaction with just the right amount of food.

Jan Chozen Bays, M.D., is a pediatrician and Zen teacher in Oregon. She is the author of Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food.

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.

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