

Food *for* Thought

A quarterly newsletter from The Center for Mindful Eating

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Winter 2012

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

What is the difference between fullness and satiety? In this issue of *Food for Thought*, we consider how the experience of being full is different from being satiated. The articles include insights from Ronna Kabatznick, Ph.D., who explores the connection between spiritual hunger and satiety. Jean Kristeller, Ph.D., offers counseling ideas to bring into your session, and Megrette Fletcher, M.Ed., RD, CDE, provides an article that has been turned 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.

Spiritual Hunger and Satiety

By Ronna Kabatznick PhD

Every spiritual tradition, from ancient to modern, teaches that we cannot survive on "bread alone." Physical food, in limited amounts, is essential for the body, but not sufficient for the heart. The consequences of trying to survive on "bread alone" are well known: The obesity crisis has spiraled out of control, as have its health and emotional costs. Misery, suffering and alienation are everywhere; their range is immeasurable. Of course, there are many factors involved in the obesity crisis, such as genetics and socioeconomic, education and exercise-related issues.

Eating, devoid of spiritual meaning, is an impersonal physical process that is inherently unsatisfactory. No matter how good or bad food tastes, it cannot last. That is not its nature. The body is bound to hunger. Hunger arises and turns to fullness. Food gets digested and then eliminated. Hunger arises again, and the cycle continues. The true nature of desire is insatiable; grasping it always leaves us feeling hungry and empty inside. That truth is why the Buddha said, "Hunger for things is the supreme disease."

The reigning ideal of the “bread alone” culture is consumerism – the relentless pursuit of pleasure and desire – based on the false promise of fulfillment. This illusory promise is what hooks us on looking for satiety in all the wrong places. Regardless of what we have, it is never enough. There is always something to need, to make us feel better.

Consumerism requires that we feel a sense of lacking, longing and deprivation. As long as we believe that happiness is the outcome of satisfying desire, the more we strengthen our bondage to forever increasing demands of desire. This futile search, contingent on external sources of gratification, continues to feed and deepen feelings of emptiness, envy, depression and the hunger to consume.

And yet spiritual food can sustain us if we recognize that our deepest longings for inner peace and contentment can be satisfied only by nonphysical nourishment that builds and endures.

Meditation and mindful eating training develop spiritual satiety; the path to establishing inner and complete satisfaction is well defined. Nevertheless, it is not easy to manage the rocky terrain between the forces of instant gratification and personal pleasure (“bread alone”) and the inner forces of self-restraint and compassionate concern (“spiritual satiety”). If it were, then spiritual hunger wouldn’t be one of the key challenges of the human condition.

We need spiritual food to sustain us. Our deepest longings for inner peace and contentment can be satisfied only by nonphysical nourishment that builds and endures. Mindfulness – spiritual food – is the cure. Ajahn Chah, one of the most highly respected meditation masters of the 20th century, said, “You can describe a mango. But to understand its taste, you need to taste it. That’s the taste of

freedom.” Ajahn Chah is referring to the qualities involved in emancipation and liberation of the mind. These are qualities that we need to experience develop and experience directly.

There are many ways to imbue food with spiritual meaning. Giving thanks or a

moment of silence before eating helps give rise to gratitude and appreciation. This helps break the habit of “eating without eating” and gives more dignity to the

experience of eating. Feeding the hungry gives rise to feelings of abundance, to the importance of physical and nonphysical forms of nourishment, and to the fullness that comes from helping others. Religious eating guidelines imbue food with greater meaning and purpose, including connection with one’s ancestors and future generations. Understanding the symbolic meaning of ritual foods gives them a taste of holiness and sanctity, a taste that reaches far beyond personal pleasure. The tendency to take food for granted or to feel isolated by one’s food and eating issues can be overcome by envisioning “the universe on our plate”: the vast web of life – from people to insects and weather – to which this food connects us.

We can also pay attention to the wanting mind, the mind that is always in motion looking, seeking, needing and unsatisfied. It is not helpful to focus on the objects of desire (e.g., a second slice of cake). Compulsive states of mind are quite painful; it requires a lot of inner strength to stay with them. We need to be willing to feel craving from the inside instead of being driven by it from the outside, as an externalized ideal. Over time, the energy pattern will weaken and eventually disappear.

When you practice mindfulness, you are truly present. Life feels full. We don’t have to eat out of anxiety, fear or just

because it’s there. We can slow down and ask ourselves, “Do I really want to eat that?” or “Have I had enough?”

We don’t have to make eating more or less than it is. As you watch the mind, pay attention to its tendency to embellish, “Too bad this olive isn’t a brownie,” or “Too bad this apple isn’t apple pie.” You can see a thought as just a thought and by doing so the mind stays protected by its natural and wholesome capacity of restraint. While it may be unfortunate that the apple isn’t apple pie, you can also reflect on the fact that millions don’t even have half of a grain of rice to eat or a drop of milk to drink. You feel grateful for what you have instead of disappointed by what you don’t. Gratitude and generosity go hand in hand.

There are times when the pain of inner emptiness is overwhelming; we lose sight of our long-term goals. When we are tempted to choose the instant relief of food, alcohol, easy sex, drugs, gambling or compulsive spending, we need to seek the support of those who are also committed to spiritual satiety. Every tradition recognizes the strength of community. Others help remind us (and we help remind others) that the entire enterprise aimed at appeasing temporal physical desire is hopeless.

When we commit to compassion, kindness and generosity as our daily bread, we will experience unshakable satiety and the end of craving.

Ronna Kabatznick can be reached at ronna@mindfulmanagement.com

Hunger for things is the supreme disease.
The Buddha



Satiety and Fullness

By Megrette Fletcher M.Ed., RD, CDE

Have you ever noticed how some meals are very rewarding and you can eat a relatively small amount of food while other meals may leave you full but still hungry for more? Satiety is the level of satisfaction a person has after eating. This is different than fullness which is referring to the physical weight or volume of food in the stomach.

To explain this concept more, imagine eating lettuce. Most people can eat a lot of lettuce. After eating the lettuce, they may feel full but not satisfied. Eating in the presence of fullness is a common experience for many people. This often happens because the physical sensation of fullness arose before the emotional experience satiety or meal satisfaction.

In every meal these two forces are present. They are engaged in a race to see who gets to the end of the meal first. When a person can recognize the emotional experience of satiety before the physical experience of fullness, the meal is often thought of as pleasant, enjoyable and satisfying. In these moments, the desire to eat stops. People will note that food was still on their plate, there were chips in the bag, or ice cream in the dish. When the emotional experience of satiety is reached after fullness has arrived, the meal can often cause physical discomfort or trigger food guilt.

How mindful eating can help

The first way mindful eating can help is to understand that the purpose of eating has shifted and the goal is to no longer to feel full but satisfied. The intent of eating is to eat a meal that has a level satiety that is pleasing to you.

Choosing to eat foods that are both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body by using all your senses to explore, savor and taste is a principle of mindful eating. To do this try the following suggestions.

Select three different foods from three different food groups. If you are not sure which foods are in which food group, visit MyPlate.Gov. The nutrient composition and calorie density of foods contribute greatly to the experience of satiety. Eating low calorie foods often can promote fullness but not satiety. The experience of never feeling satisfied after eating can lead to habitual overeating.



Continue to use your senses when selecting a meal. Choose a meal that has three distinct colors. This step uses the sensory experience of your eyes.

Next choose three distinct textures: soft, creamy, chewy, crunchy, dry, cold, wet. This step uses the sensory experience of mouth feel and chewing which is also associated with satiety.

Hop around the meal, tasting one bite fully and another food. Resist the urge to eat a single food till it is gone.

This step resets the pallet, enhancing how food flavors taste.

Pause frequently while eating and check in with your body and observe what you are feeling. Notice if hunger, fullness, or satiety is present. Have fun as you experiment with eating this way.

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

Knowing When Enough Is Enough

By Jean L. Kristeller, Ph.D.

How do you know when you've eaten enough? Posing this question to clients provides a path for introducing a core issue: the concept of satiety. Satiety, as a level of "satisfaction," actually has many components, some psychological and some physiological.

There are three core types of physical satiety signals: stomach fullness; "body" satiety; and taste satiety / satisfaction (technically known as "sensory-specific satiety"). There is considerable evidence that individuals with weight issues / eating disorders are less sensitive to these signals. However, we have found in our research on MB-EAT that most individuals can learn to tune in to them by slowing down, cultivating a mindful awareness of these experiences, and attending to them with curiosity and self-acceptance.

As pointed out in the article by Megrette Fletcher, the speed at which we experience fullness varies by the density of the food. Lettuce (or water) may fill us up quickly but provides little satisfaction in terms of “body” satiety, or that sense of an increase in blood sugar levels and decrease in hunger. Conversely, eating a calorically dense granola bar may quickly take the “edge” off feelings of physical hunger, but will not be experienced as “filling.”

Individuals with binge eating patterns may report only extreme levels of fullness as having eaten enough, so their goal is to recognize middle levels of fullness as satisfying

The most immediate feedback system is taste satiety; our taste buds literally tire after only a few

bites, taking longer if we are physically hungrier or if the food is more complex in texture and flavor. It is helpful to have your clients visualize a “taste satisfaction” meter that will go up to a certain point depending on how tasty the food is, but will ALWAYS drop back down as more food is eaten and the taste buds become less sensitive. Individuals who overeat tend to ignore these shifts in taste experience. As they continue to eat, they are instead “chasing the flavor” of those first few bites, and in the long run, creating even more dissatisfaction.

It is also very important to explore the meaning and value of eating as Ronna Kabatznick points out. Is the food meeting a need that is better met another way? Is there a sense of deprivation, or even self-

A core question to pose to clients: How do you know when you've eaten enough?

punishment, that is met by eating too much? How can individuals learn to bring their eating into better balance, nurturing themselves in both body and soul, with the type and amount of food that feels satisfying, yet is neither excessive nor restrictive? These are all aspects of cultivating a better balance in learning to eat “for quality, not quantity.”

Jean Kristeller, Ph.D., is a clinical and research psychologist at Indiana State University. She developed MB-EAT and is a co-founder of TCME.org. She can be reached at 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.

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\$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.*

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The Center for Mindful Eating

P.O.Box 88

West Nottingham NH
03291

603-778-5841

info@tcme.org