

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Mindful eating is no longer a secret. It's the zen-inspired mindset championed by health-conscious celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Gwyneth Paltrow and Goldie Hawn, as the simplest way to combat cravings and lose weight. Born from the age-old concept of mindfulness, mindful eating is a healthy way of eating to help combat modern eating problems.

It's not a diet. There are no menus or food restrictions. It's aim is to develop a new mindset around food – a mindset which enables us to tune into our internal desires and differentiate between emotional and physical hunger cues.

Mindful eating dispels the myth of meal time multitasking and asks us to slow down, smell the aromas, enjoy our food and manage our weight and well-being in the process. Many studies show us that practising this way of eating not only reduces binge eating but can also boost digestion and improve our enjoyment of food. Hungry to know more? Nutritionist Sorcha Molloy shares her top tips for mindful eating.

DITCH THE DISTRACTIONS

The foundation of mindful eating is to avoid distractions at mealtimes. We all know how beating the morning traffic can tempt us to become a dashboard diner or a busy day may leave us dining 'al desko' as we elect to multitask through lunch. Yet science has repeatedly shown us that unconscious eating can lead to binge eating and weight gain. Cutting out distractions is important because it is something you may not

even be aware of. Being distracted or multi-tasking whilst eating food will affect both your appetite and weight as you can eat up to 70% more when you are distracted. A good example of this is eating in the cinema, where you can get through a lot of food and drink and not even really be aware of it, as you mechanically pop food into your mouth while staring at the screen.

Interestingly, research has shown that eating lunch in front of your computer makes it harder to remember what you have eaten. As a result, you don't feel full and may want something else to eat. One study found computer users then ate twice as many biscuits half an hour later than the non-computer users eating lunch. The same happens if you watch TV or use your smart phone whilst you eat your lunch. As your brain has not been tuned into your meal, you can be left feeling unsatisfied which drives cravings and you then end up eating more in the afternoon. Of course, this can happen after your evening meal too, leaving you hunting around for something to snack on late in the evening.

TUNE INTO CHEWING

The advice our parents gave us was very good when it comes to

digestion – don't speak with your mouth full and chew properly. Chewing is so important because the health and efficiency of your digestive system is dependent on what happens during the first part of digestion, which takes place in your mouth whilst chewing. The mechanical action of chewing supports digestion by breaking down your food into smaller pieces before it is swallowed. These smaller pieces of food come into more contact with the enzymes contained in your saliva, which also trigger the release of digestive enzymes in the stomach. This sequence of events enhances your overall digestion and absorption of nutrients for health.

When you eat fast you can often overeat. The brain takes 20 minutes to register that you are full. So, when you eat more slowly and listen to your internal cues of feelings of fullness, you will automatically feel more satisfied from eating less food, which is helpful if you want to lose weight.

RESIST EATING ON THE RUN

When you eat on the run, your body thinks it is under threat. This type of stress causes the energy necessary for digestion to be diverted elsewhere. This means that your levels of stomach acid and digestive enzymes may be lower than they should be. So if you are eating on the run, grabbing a sandwich at lunchtime but still working at your desk or rushing off to meet someone and eating the sandwich on the way, then you may not digest that food properly. You won't adequately absorb the goodness from that food and you'll end up feeling bloated and uncomfortable. A good practice to avoid eating on the run is to always sit down when eating and take your time. Embrace the concept of mindful eating – that is take your time when you eat and savour the flavours and textures of your food.



Sorcha Molloy BSc (Hons), MBant runs the Glenville Nutrition Clinic Galway, founded by Dr. Marilyn Glenville PhD, ensuring the very best nutritional advice on women's health and supporting couples preparing for pregnancy either naturally or in conjunction with IVF. If you have a health concern and would like to have an initial chat to explore how Sorcha may be able to help you, call her now on: 091 726344 or visit glenvillenutrition.ie

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AVERT AUTOMATIC ACTIONS

Try to avoid unconscious eating where you are concentrating on something else rather than the food. Have a look at what has become automatic. Do you always buy something to eat on the way home from work, or go straight to the fridge when you get in? Again, this action can be almost unconscious. A vital key is to become aware of what you are doing. Stop, think and ask yourself: 'Do I really need to eat this now? Will I be happy with the way I feel after I have eaten it?' Ask yourself if you are actually hungry, or could you in fact be thirsty? Sometimes these messages get confused, and we are really feeling dehydrated rather than hungry. Try drinking a glass of water, then see if you still feel hungry. Enjoy your food. If you decide to eat a bar of chocolate that is fine, but just eat the bar of chocolate. Don't watch television or read the newspaper while you do it. Really taste the chocolate, start with a small piece eating it slowly and mindfully, being fully aware of the textures and flavours. Don't feel guilty about eating it – just make sure you really enjoy every single nibble and then make the next choice a healthy choice.