

THE WHOLE YOU

Mindful Eating Meditation How to Curb Compulsive Overeating

By Jan Foster, L.P.C.C., C.Y.I., P.R.Y.T.

What is a mindful eating meditation and how can it help curb compulsive overeating?

Mindful eating is a way to transform your relationship with food and with your body. This simple meditation practice trains you to eat with more awareness so you can experience more satisfaction from food. When I introduce this practice in workshops or to individual clients, they are usually shocked to find they can eat

about half the amount of food they are used to eating and still feel satisfied.

This approach to eating may be very different from how you normally eat, which may include while you drive, talk, work, watch TV or just drift off somewhere else in the mind as you're eating. This fundamental inattention to the meal often results in wanting to eat again and more. The basic premise of mindful eating is that we don't just hunger for food alone. We hunger for the experience of it – the chewing, tasting, the textures, the sounds, smells and especially the satisfaction.

Is this practice hard to do? Do I have to know how to meditate before beginning?

This is a practice that can be done with minimal effort and still get maximum results.

It is not necessary to eat every bite of every meal mindfully. I have been impressed that even a few minutes of each meal devoted to mindful eating will begin to change your relationship with your body and allow you to begin to make

peace with food and eating.

In the beginning, I recommend doing an entire guided practice regularly, about once a week for starters. Then simply devote a few minutes of each meal to mindful eating or set aside a few meals each week for mindful eating. After mindful eating becomes a regular part of your lifestyle, you will only need to check in with it occasionally to keep on track or get back on track.

You don't need prior meditation experience to do this practice. Experienced meditators recognize that mindful eating is a very practical application of vipassana (insight) meditation, similar to other mindfulness practices.

Will I have to change the types of food I eat or observe any dietary restrictions in order to eat mindfully?

I often recommend that participants bring to the mindful eating experience a food that is "highly charged" for them. An example of this could be their favorite food and/or a food that they consider "forbidden" or "sinful" to eat. When this food is eaten mindfully, without judgment (it is neither "good" nor "bad"), the insight that comes and the behavior changes that follow are often amazing.

Some participants discover that the foods they consider the most sinfully delicious, when eaten mindfully, may actually not taste as good after all. These foods usually are not as satisfying as they previously thought. They begin to naturally gravitate toward foods that are more abundant and alive. Others, like one participant who brought her favorite candy bar, find that they are able to so thoroughly enjoy their favorite forbidden food and find that it is completely satisfying in moderation.

In one of my meditation classes, we practiced mindful eating every week for eight weeks. One participant, who was already a very healthy eater and exercised regularly, lost twenty pounds simply by learning to eat more mindfully. That was three years ago and the weight is still off.

More than what kind of food you eat or nutritional system you follow, eating with awareness is the most important and powerful tool to transform your relationship to food and to your body.

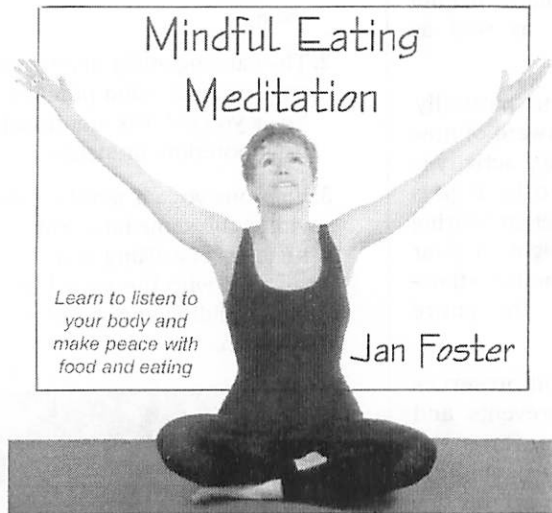
What are some of the steps to mindful eating?

For many of us our eating habits are set on automatic pilot. By habit we are driven to eat when we are not hungry or not to eat when we are hungry. First, the most basic act of the eating process is to make the conscious choice of whether to eat or not to eat. Second, your body intuitively knows when, what and how much to eat. By learning to listen to your body, rather than your mental habits and conditioning, you can learn to trust the messages your body sends you.

The heart of mindful eating is to eat with awareness, so you can achieve the fullest experience of the food possible. The guided experience prompts the listener to pay attention to the look, smell and temperature of the food, as well as identifying the tastes and textures of the food. Eating with awareness helps us use the bodily sensations experienced during eating as an anchor for the restless mind, a mind that can't wait to eat, yet refuses to pay attention once it is eating.

Who can benefit from mindful eating?

This practice can be used with any type of diet or any problems you may experience with food. Anyone who wants to be satisfied with less food, to enjoy the experience of eating more and make the act of eating a spiritual experience will benefit from this practice.



Jan Foster is a licensed professional clinical counselor, certified Phoenix Rising yoga therapist and certified yoga instructor. She has just released two new CDs, Mindful Eating Meditation and Guided Relaxations: The Best of Jan Foster, as well as her first in a series of yoga videos, Salute to the Moon. You can contact her at 502-426-1616 or at www.janfoster.net.

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