

TCME *Food for Thought* TCME

A quarterly newsletter from The Center for Mindful Eating

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Fall 2013

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

In this issue of *Food for Thought*, we take on multitasking. Enjoy the wisdom of Jan Chozen Bays, MD, who explains, "When we don't pay attention to our food and our body as we eat, we rob ourselves of the full experience, and therefore the full satisfaction, of eating." Rebecca Gladding, MD, offers a wonderful article, which is also a patient-care handout, titled "The Perils of Multitasking" that guides the reader through six steps to eating more mindfully. "When we engage in mindful eating, everything slows down." Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE, explores how mindful eating can help our brains process a vast amount of sensory information when we eat.

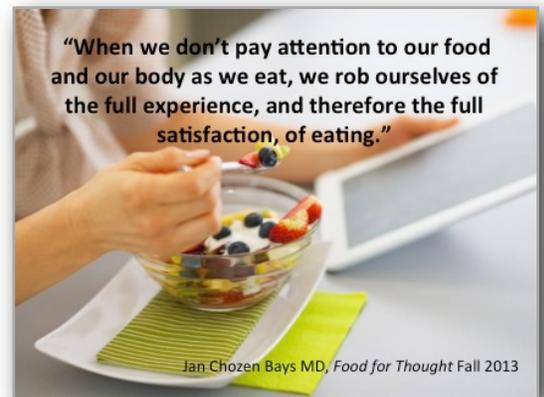
We express our gratitude to the many individuals who have become members of TCME over the past year. Their tax-deductible donations allow us to continue to provide valuable services. If you are not a member, please consider joining.

Mindful Eating and Multitasking

By Jan Chozen Bays, MD

As our world has become faster paced and more complex, multitasking has become the norm. We don't just drive, relaxing and enjoying the scenery. We drive, drink coffee, eat a bagel, listen to the news on the radio and talk on a speakerphone all at the same time. As communication becomes faster, the demand to get things done immediately becomes so loud and urgent that anxiety begins to permeate our waking hours.

We long for "the old days," when people took a leisurely trip across the



Jan Chozen Bays MD, *Food for Thought* Fall 2013

country by train, looking at the scenery, reading a long set-aside book and walking to the gently swaying dining car for a relaxing meal. Our modern day is filled with a sandwich eaten unconsciously as we answer urgent emails, sit in traffic jams and rush to a fitness workout or yoga class. A quick flight across the country becomes anything but speedy or relaxing when we count the hours spent finding a parking place, standing in the security line, buying something to eat on the flight, searching for gas for the rental car, and feeling the generalized irritation and anxiety generated by the mode of “hurry up and wait.”

There is an ancient Zen saying, “When hungry, just eat!” This sounds simple, but in a speeded-up world, it is not so easy to do. Somehow we cannot take the time out of our busy schedules to just eat or just drive or just sit and be present.

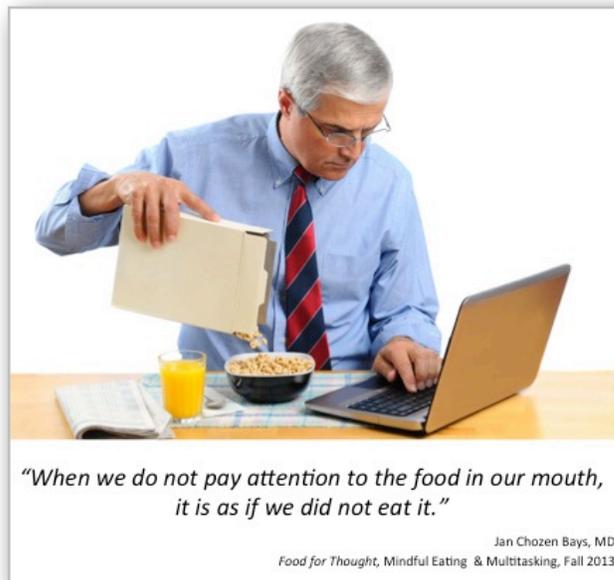
Mindfulness helps us slow down and be present for our life. When we are mindful, we notice many small and lovely things, the shadow that dances beside us as we walk, the sparkle of mica flakes in the sidewalk, the steam curling up from our cup of tea, the pattern of tiny seeds on the surface of a strawberry. Mindfulness also helps us notice that when we do two or three things at once, we cannot pay

full attention to any of them. When we eat something delicious, like a lemon tart, at the same time we are answering email, we may enjoy the first bite or two (Yum, yum, flaky crust, creamy filling, just the right combination of sweet and tart), but soon we become absorbed in the glowing screen. A few minutes later, we look down at the plate on our desk and ask in dismay, “What happened to my lemon tart?” All that remains are a few crumbs and a bit of lingering

one!”). When we pay full attention as we eat, by placing mindful awareness in our mouth, then even a small meal can become a large and satisfying experience. One lemon tart, eaten in small, spaced bites, can provide interest and enjoyment over the span of 15 or 20 minutes.

As one participant in a mindful eating workshop exclaimed, “Eating is the most enjoyable thing I do each day. Why don’t I pay attention when I’m doing it? It’s so self-defeating!” Yes, it is. When we don’t pay attention to our food and our body as we eat, we rob ourselves of the full experience, and therefore the full satisfaction, of eating. Then we feel compelled to eat more, trying in vain to make a larger volume of food replace the intimate and joyful experience of mindful awareness of the one bite that is in our mouth now.

Be aware of the first few bites. You may object that you simply don’t have time to eat all meals mindfully. There are two solutions. One is to practice being completely aware of the first few bites or first few sips of everything you eat or drink. Really savor them. Then acknowledge, “Now I am going to switch to mindless eating and drinking.” Mindful eating includes times when we eat mindlessly. It is awareness that counts. Awareness gives us a choice. If you are aware that you are eating mindlessly, you are able to switch back to eating



flavor on the tongue.

When we do not pay attention to the food in our mouth, it is as if we did not eat it. The mouth misses the flavors because the mind was elsewhere. The mouth loves flavors and textures. When the mouth is deprived of the full experience of tastes and textures, salty and sweet, crunches and creaminess, it will demand more to eat (“I don’t remember eating that lemon tart so I need another

mindfully, even for a few bites.

The second solution is called alternating practice. You savor one or two bites or swallows, then stop eating and turn your attention to the other task at hand, answering email or making a phone call.

After a few minutes, you stop working and become fully attentive as you eat or drink a bit more. In this way, you give the sensors in the mouth and nose time to refresh so that you can experience “first bite” flavor with each bite.

Alternating practice can also be used in social situations. People who are able to eat mindfully while alone often ask about how to eat with awareness while eating and talking with others.

Alternating practice works here, too. Pay full attention for a few bites, then lay down your fork and turn your full attention to your friends or family. This adds the most important nutrient in our human lives – intimacy – to the meal. You can even ask your friends or family to join you in a few moments of silent eating before conversation begins, so you can all appreciate the food before you and the people who brought it to you. This is a lovely way to offer appreciation to the host or hostess. Tell them that you would like to give your full, silent attention for a



few minutes to what they have spent time preparing.

We can all benefit by purposely undertaking the practice of single-tasking at least several times a day. It can improve the health of our body-mind and increase our appreciation and happiness with the simple things that make up the unique moments of our unique life.

Jan Chozen Bays, MD, is a pediatrician and Zen teacher. She wrote Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyous Relationship to Food and How to Train a Wild Elephant, a collection of 53 mindfulness exercises.

The Perils of Multitasking

Rebecca Gladding, MD

We've all been there... Finish that memo, respond to email, complete the work project that was due yesterday, do the laundry, wash the dishes, work out, get the kids to practice, cook dinner, change the oil in the car, buy groceries. So many things to do and not enough hours in the day. We prioritize what we think needs to get done right now, but how often do we

step back and ask ourselves what we are sacrificing along the way?

When we rush through our days and don't stop to reflect, we act on impulse. We are reactive rather than proactive. This way of living limits us, keeping us focused on short-term goals rather than long-term interests or solutions.

One way we can stop this cycle is to eat mindfully. When we engage in mindful eating, everything slows down. When we stop to notice our food, what it tastes like, what it smells like, its texture and so on, we are much more likely to notice if we are amped up, stressed or running on autopilot in a rather directionless way. The more we notice this, the more likely we are to re-center ourselves throughout the day. In this way, mindful eating can be like a reset button to help us determine how we want to spend the next few hours.

So, what can you do?

- Make a commitment to yourself: Do not do anything else while you are eating (i.e., no multitasking).
- Set aside at least 10 minutes at each meal to try to notice each bite.
- As you are eating, become aware of the thoughts flying through your head – notice them, but do not indulge them or give in to them. Simply let them rise and fall without becoming ensnared by them.
- At the end of your meal, set an intention for how you will spend the next few hours (until your next meal, when

you will have another opportunity to reflect and re-center).

- If you have a lot to do, choose one or two things you would like to do or accomplish in that time period. Do not be overambitious, do not make huge lists or attempt to do something that is unrealistic. Just choose a couple of things that are achievable and set an intention to do them with your best effort.
- When the next meal comes, see what you have completed and then set a new intention (which may include resting or relaxation).

Try this for a week and see what happens. If you are able to be mindful and set intentions with each meal, you probably will not need to multitask as much and will actually accomplish more in a shorter period when you focus on only one task at a time.

Rebecca Gladding MD, served on the TCME.org board and is the co-author of *You Are Not Your Brain*, to learn more visit: <http://www.rebeccagladdingmd.com/>

Multitasking

By Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE

Eating a meal may not feel like multitasking, but it actually is.

Eating stimulates all of our sensory organs, providing our brain with

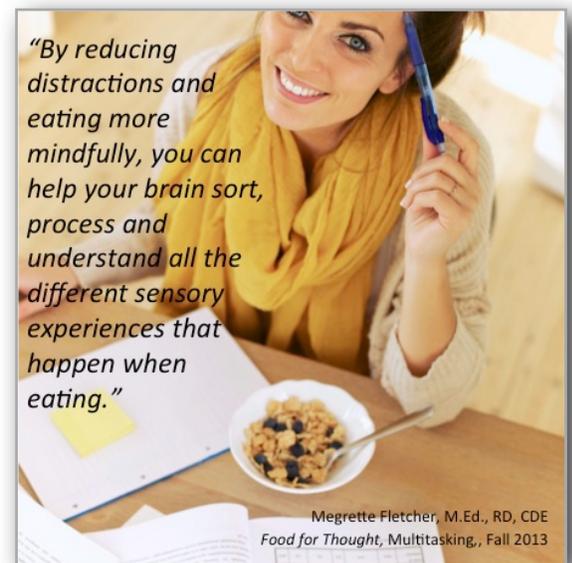
an incredible amount of information to sort, process and understand. Think about it. We use our eyes to see the food. We use our nose to smell the aroma that enhances the flavor of each bite. We use our tongue, nose and eyes to taste our food fully. When these sensory organs are stimulated, our brain is activated and forms memories, creating awareness and integrating all of these different sensory events into something we call eating.

If you find yourself distracted by work, TV or the computer, consider creating a quieter space at the next meal. In that openness, try to let your mind relax from the tasks and responsibilities of the day. Taking three large breaths before eating can help you mentally prepare for the meal. As you exhale each breath, imagine that you are letting go of worry and stress as well. In this quiet space, take a bite of food. Now try to observe different things about the bite, such as temperature, taste, texture, aftertaste, and your sense of hunger or fullness.

Ask yourself, "Are my thoughts getting in the way of how the food actually

tastes?" If this is the case, put down the fork and rest between bites. It may be helpful to take another deep breath and remind yourself to relax. By reducing environmental and mental distractions, you can help your brain sort, process and understand all the different sensory experiences that happen when eating. When you give your full attention to a bite, the experience of a meal is richer and, somehow, larger.

Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE, is a registered dietitian, certified diabetes educator, and a cofounder of TCME.org. She is the co-author of two books: Discover Mindful Eating: A resource of handouts for health professionals and Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat with Diabetes. To learn more about Megrette, please visit her at megrette.com



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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.