

FOOD *for* THOUGHT

AUTUMN 2014

Anxiety & Food

Breaking the habit of stress eating



In this issue:



How
Anxious
Are You?

page 3



Mindful
Eating with
Anxiety

page 5



Full Living
Despite
Turmoil

page 7



About The Center for Mindful Eating:

Our Mission:

The mission of The Center for Mindful Eating, also known as TCME, is to help people achieve a balanced, respectful, healthy and joyful relationship with food and eating. By providing an easily accessible source of information and opportunities to interact via the web and in other ways, we seek to train and encourage professionals who can then foster this capacity in others.

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Board Members Corner: TCME Annual Retreat

Did you know The Center for Mindful Eating board of directors now spans five time zones and four countries? With such an expansion of our board this past year, we felt it was essential that we come together to meet in person for our annual meeting. In July we met at a small summer home on the coast of Rhode Island. For four days we delighted in getting to know one another in new ways as we laughed, discussed, planned and envisioned the direction and future of The Center for Mindful Eating.

Our time together was full of meetings, but we particularly valued sharing meals together (mindfully, of course!) as well as playing together with long walks, kayaking, and the sort of silliness that arises when you are working so intensely on a project that you just need to pause to sing a song or have a good laugh. Topics on the agenda included responding to the rapidly growing worldwide interest in mindful eating; evolving our teleconferences and supportive trainings; and crafting position statements in response to current trends in the field.

We asked some of our board members to share their experience:

“We came together as colleagues, we left as friends. The Annual Meeting offered The Center for Mindful Eating board members an opportunity to taste

each other’s passion for eating mindfully. It was simply delicious!”

~ Megrette Fletcher

“I was deeply inspired by the gathering of kind, wise, luminous, and energetic women strongly committed to spreading the word of a practice that can ease a tremendous amount of suffering in how people relate to food, to their bodies and to their relationship with themselves. I was also very grateful to have joined this Board, to continue a project started by teachers whose wisdom I am in awe of.”

~ Lilia Graue

“What a privilege to gather together with the voices in the mindful eating world that I so admire. And then to brainstorm on how to advance the mission of The Center for Mindful Eating to better help others -- well, it’s an honor to be a part of it.”

~ Marsha Hudnall

“The days in Rhode Island were intense as we deeply focused on the needs of TCME so that it can flourish. There was wonderful cohesion and genuine passion for mindful eating.”

~ Cinzia Pezzolesi

“It was so exciting to be with others who share a passion for spreading the amazing message of mindful eating all around the world!!”

~ Cheryl Wasserman

*On a scale of
all or nothing*

how anxious are you?



Char Wilkins

MSW, LCSW

Before she even sits down to discuss her nutritional needs she warns you that she can't sit still. She's sorry about the bouncing knee, but it's just who she is.

Sure, he's a little anxious about it; who wouldn't be? But it's just a nervous habit that's gotten out of hand and he needs a few tips on how to get a grip on eating when he's stressed out, that's all.

She immediately explains that she knows she binges because she's a worrier, especially about her family and her weight. If you don't worry, you must not care. And, she adds, her mother worries, too, so it must be genetic.

Have you noticed how anxiety runs like a low-grade fever in our culture and seems to have reached epidemic proportions? The most common response to the casual greeting "Hi, how are you?" is "Busy. Too busy." In fact,

answering with anything less would put you in the category of Not Trying Hard Enough or Not Successful Enough to Be Busy. It seems it's a badge of honor if the speed at which your life is moving is out of control, and indeed, anything slower than a blur is questionable. Fastest, smartest, fittest, richest, thinnest, strongest, prettiest, busiest. You name it, the top is the only place to be and the bar is always moving up.

People are under so much pressure to be the best and are desperately trying to deal with the anxiety of not measuring up, never being enough. The momentary relief of inhaling six doughnuts followed by the Critic's relentless berating for the binge is more bearable than feeling the feverish emotion that drives the binge. So they shop in excess, abuse drink and drug, over-exercise, sleep to forget, isolate to avoid, and eat. And eat. And eat. Or don't eat. Because one of the few things they can control is the food they do or do not put in their mouth, and they are anxious about every bite.

Anxiety is on the continuum of Fear. It's somewhere between mildly irritated and road rage. But the problem with the word "anxiety" is it's vague. I'm mildly irritated

continued on page 4

how anxious are you?

Continued from Page 3

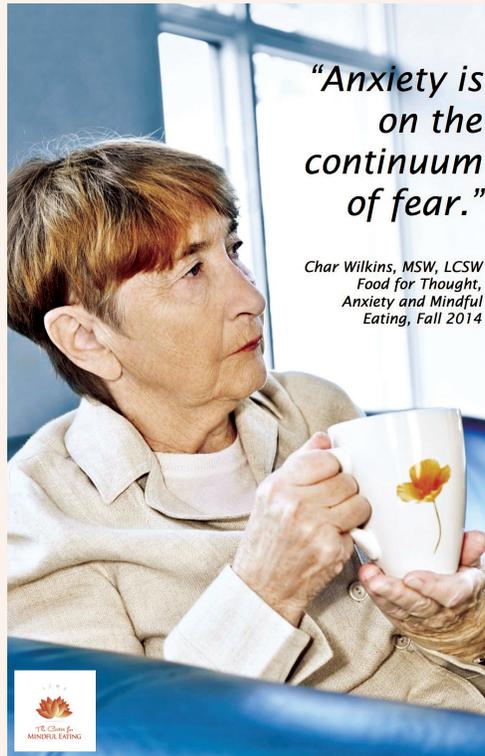
when a fly buzzes my lemonade glass and I'm a hothead when people don't use turn signals. Those emotions I can define. But when a client tells me she's anxious, I really have no idea what she means. And here's the problem: I'm tempted to assume or guess what she means based on my own experience, or to ask "Why do you think you're anxious?" And with that question she retreats in fear to her habituated "I don't know" or "It's just the way I am" reactivity.

Clinicians dread hearing those two sentences because they have a nothing-is-going-to-change-end-of-discussion, dead-end feeling to them. It's not unusual as those sentences hang in the air for both the professional and the client to feel anxious and helpless.

It's tempting at this point for the clinician to chase the "Why" question with another "Why" and then "But why?" It's a bit like chasing a chipmunk that instantly has yards on you and is bee-lining down the well-worn escape hole to safety where you can't reach her. We know that running away from what we fear only strengthens anxious thought patterns and behaviors, but how do we not chase the client or the behavior?

Fear fuels binge eating. Bingeing fuels anxiety. And anxiety is scary because it feels overwhelming and as though there is nothing the client can do about it. It feels BIG, too big to deal with so she retreats into anger or sadness that she then eats in the form of foods that comfort or punish her, and the cycle continues because she feels ashamed of her behavior. She fears she's not enough or that she's too much. The All or Nothing Cycle translates into how, when, what and where she binges.

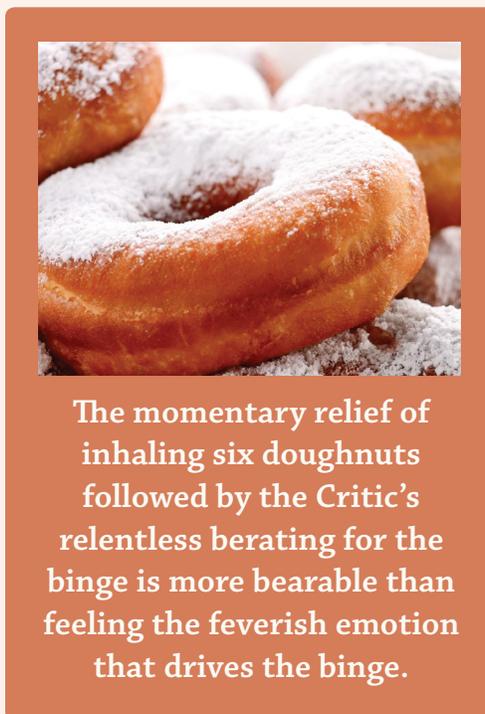
Our client's anxiety provides the perfect opportunity for us as clinicians to not only cultivate compassion and curiosity for her but also to work with



"Anxiety is on the continuum of fear."

Char Wilkins, MSW, LCSW
Food for Thought,
Anxiety and Mindful
Eating, Fall 2014

our own anxiety. Often in our effort to deliver caring attention and service to our clients, we, too, worry we aren't enough, which can result in berating ourselves for being unable to reach or motivate our client. Pausing to become mindful of our own thoughts and emotions can interrupt our spiraling into



The momentary relief of inhaling six doughnuts followed by the Critic's relentless berating for the binge is more bearable than feeling the feverish emotion that drives the binge.

disappointment in ourselves or worry for our client.

Intellectually we know that there is no perfect phrase or technique that will solve our client's disordered eating or end her anxiety, yet we may be under pressure to produce results that are reflected in weight loss or gain, compliance, improved mood or health markers. That tension can cause us to be anxious. The practicality of mindfulness in the moment is that we ourselves can practice throughout the day, each time we guide a willing client in a brief one- or two-minute mindfulness meditation. When we offer simple instructions such as: feel the bottom of your feet on the floor, notice the points of physical contact where your body is making contact with the chair, notice the sensations that are present with each breath in and out, we, too, benefit by participating as we lead. Even a short pause such as this can interrupt habituated fearful thinking and allow us and our client to see that there is choice even in the midst of familiar, anxious patterns.

Healing takes place in relationship and that possibility exists each time we are with a client. We all desire connection, and I believe that people connect not through words, but through presence with one another – in the silence between the words. Don't miss the "exactly enough" moments that rest between "not enough" and "too much" thinking.

Char Wilkins, MSW, LCSW, is a mindfulness-based psychotherapist who works with women recovering from childhood abuse, disordered eating and body image. She is a certified MBSR instructor, trains professionals internationally in MBSR, MBCT and MECL (Mindful Eating/Conscious Living), and offers consultation for professionals. She serves on the TCME Board. www.amindfulpath.com

Anxiety Can Prevent Us From Eating Mindfully



Jan Chozen Bays

MD

Anxiety is a very pervasive emotion in our modern, fast-paced society, but anxiety is not a good long-term fuel for life. It costs dearly in wear and tear on our bodies and minds.

There are so many things to worry about, all over the world! Because our

mind wants to protect us from disaster, it is attracted to potential danger, including “dangerous” foods. Our anxious mind tells us, “You shouldn’t have had that soda; research shows soda causes osteoporosis.” “Don’t eat too many eggs. You’ll raise your cholesterol and have a stroke.” “Don’t eat cantaloupe! It might give you salmonella!”

Anxiety can trigger emotional eating. There is a good reason for this. When we make a list of signs of hunger

– a gnawing, empty feeling in the stomach; rapid heart rate; feeling faint, weak or dizzy; trouble concentrating; feeling irritable – we realize that they are identical to the symptoms of anxiety. So it makes sense that we eat when anxious, trying to relieve what we mistakenly interpret as hunger.

But this can set a vicious cycle in motion. When we realize that we’ve eaten inappropriately, we only feel more anxious. Anxiety → eat → become more anxious → eat more → etc.

Here are two ways to practice with anxiety:

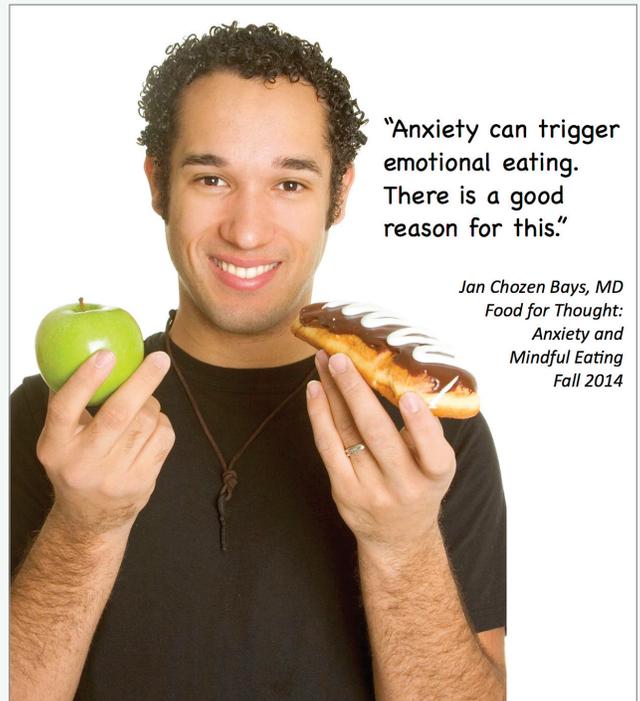
#1 Investigate anxiety and its antidotes

Anxiety is so pervasive that we may not realize we are anxious. It can be helpful to track anxiety for one week. How does it manifest in your body? Do you hunch forward while driving? Do you tighten your brow or facial muscles when the tension mounts in a meeting? Does your heart rate go up when you hear the morning news? When does anxiety first manifest during the day? Before you get up? With the first cup of coffee? On the drive to work? How does anxiety manifest in your mind? Racing thoughts? A sudden desire to eat?

You can check your anxiety level at intervals during the day. If anxiety is present, stop and practice a few moments of mindful breathing. Anxiety can make breathing quick and shallow, so you might try somewhat slower and deeper breaths. Move your awareness as far as possible from the anxiety-producing thoughts in your head by shifting your awareness to the bottom of your feet and the solid ground beneath them. Imagine breathing out anxiety and breathing in peace of mind.

#2 Separate anxiety from hunger

When you feel unexpectedly hungry, check internally and ask your body, “Is this true hunger or is it actually anxiety?” If it is anxiety, eating may make it worse. When we realize that our true need is not for comfort food, we can make another choice. We can “feed” and comfort ourselves in many different ways: call a friend, take a shower, drink a cup of herbal tea, take a five-minute walk outside, do a few yoga poses, play with a cat or dog, rest your eyes in nature, listen to a soothing piece of music, or do five minutes of meditation. You can make your own list of “non-food comforting snacks” that relieve anxiety for you.



“Anxiety can trigger emotional eating. There is a good reason for this.”

*Jan Chozen Bays, MD
Food for Thought:
Anxiety and
Mindful Eating
Fall 2014*

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.”

Food for Thought handouts may be reproduced and distributed for educational purposes.

Meet TCME Board Member Caroline Baerten, RD



In this issue we are delighted to introduce Caroline Baerten,

founder of MeNu, Centre for Mindful Eating and Nutrition in the heart of Europe (me-nu.org, Brussels, 2009). Since founding MeNu, she's been facilitating eight-week mindful eating training programs in Belgium and in group settings and private consultations. She is part of several research projects in which the impact of mindful eating on health, well-being and ecology are studied. Once a month, she guides a sangha (practice community) in Brussels where they practice mindfulness during sitting, walking, tea drinking and mindful eating. Since 2013, she has created a platform for renowned trainers from the United States (Jan Chozen Bays, Char Wilkins, Jean Kristeller) to facilitate mindful eating training programs for European professionals in healthcare.

Caroline joined The Center for Mindful Eating board of directors in 2012. Based in Brussels, she attended her first annual retreat via Skype in 2013! Upon joining the TCME

board, Caroline started making considerable strides in bringing more awareness of mindful eating across the globe. Just months after Caroline joined us, our TCME inbox exploded with international queries about how to learn more, where to receive trainings, and how to access resources.

Caroline's personal mindfulness practice is under the guidance of Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh and Dharma teacher Thay Phap at the European Institute of Applied Buddhism. She has a particular interest in the environmental impact of food and eating and chairs our Sustainability task group. "Through food we reconnect our internal environment with the external natural elements, bringing in balance the ecology of human mind and ecology of the Earth." Caroline's passion for mindful eating is intimately connected with her passion for the Earth and its inhabitants. With every bite she takes, she considers the impact of mindful consumption and food waste on the systems all around us. In her life and work, Caroline encourages mindful food choices based on culinary pleasure (she also has a background as a chef) and sustainable interaction with consumers, produce and (local) producers. Thank

you, Caroline, for joining the TCME board and for sharing your passion with all of us. Learn more about Caroline's work at www.me-nu.org.

Blending Dietetics & Communications in Summer Internship



Angela Wheeler, our summer intern, is nearing the end of

her time with us. Angela is working toward her bachelor's in dietetics with a minor in mass media at Minnesota State University. She has really jumped in and stirred the pot to help us develop our marketing and public communications at TCME.

Working closely with our Operations Manager, Michelle, our dedicated student has updated our social media content, created a timeline of posts through 2015 highlighting national days and months related to mindful eating, and brainstormed how we can better connect with our members. We asked Angela how she would describe her TCME experience:

"Incredible, meaningful and fulfilling are just a few of the words that popped into my head as soon as I asked myself, 'How would I describe my experience as The Center

for Mindful Eating intern?'

"Incredible because I have met some of the top professionals in the field of mindful eating. Not only did I meet them but I also interviewed and collaborated with them to produce articles on mindful eating topics.

"Meaningful because through working with mindful eating professionals, pulling quotes from Food for Thought publications, and attending various TCME teleconferences, I have developed a deeper understanding of what mindful eating really is and, also what it isn't.

"Last, fulfilling because I was able to see some of my ideas and projects take flight, whether it was through launching the "Ask a Mindful Eating Question" initiative, creating content for TCME's Twitter and Facebook accounts, or reading the articles I helped produce on the TCME blog. The Center for Mindful Eating has provided amazing experiences that I will take with me and apply in my own life as I continue my personal journey to becoming a registered dietitian. I am exceedingly grateful to the organization for granting me this remarkable opportunity and to everybody who has been a part of my time with TCME."

More great news and updates from the [TCME blog](http://www.me-nu.org)

Full Living in the Turmoil of Anxiety



Caroline Baerten

RD

“It is an unpleasant feeling; I want to get rid of it!” – These are often the only words people can express when asked to describe their anxiety. However, anxiety is an emotion that occurs very frequently and it may strongly affect eating behavior. It is not the same as fear, which is an appropriate response to danger. Anxiety is a more complex feeling, with elements of fear, worry and uneasiness, and is often accompanied by restlessness and muscular tension.

The origins of anxiety

In general, anxiety is the unpleasant feeling of dread that something negative is going to happen in the future. The feeling of anxiety is particularly fed by rumination, such as worrying about calorie-intake, weight gain, appearance, social rejection, healthy or unhealthy foods. The list of threats is endless.

People with restrictive eating patterns (or more extreme: anorexia, orthorexia) often experience anxiety before, during or after a meal. The food is seen as a potential threat to their weight or health.

Through controlling emotions, thoughts, weight or food intake, people try to get a grip on this undefinable feeling. Unfortunately they continue to affect us and bring us even more anxiety.

“Anxiety comes primarily from our inability to dwell in the present moment,” as Thich Nhat Hanh states in his book *Savor*.

When we have the power to look



deeply at our emotions at this moment, then anxiety, fear and worry cannot control us anymore.

First step: Welcoming our feelings

The first part of looking at our anxiety is just inviting it into our awareness without judgments, being overwhelmed or suppressing the feeling. This process of pausing and allowing the uncomfortable feeling creates a space and brings a lot of relief.

Second step: Acknowledging what is here

When we can acknowledge our anxious thinking, we will see clearly how it keeps us focused on the past or worried about the future. Only then we can realize that right now we are okay. Right now, we are still alive, and our senses can experience the beautiful colors and the delicious tastes of food on the plate.

Third step: Connecting with the body

Emotions don't just happen in the brain, they are closely linked to the condition of the body. We may not realize we are hungry, excited, anxious or happy,

without this link to a reaction in our body, particularly in the heart and the gut. The body gives a signal – a stitch, cold feet, a heat flare, or a nerve signal – that doesn't even register in our consciousness.

Fourth step: Dialoguing within

“Is this anxious feeling coming from something that is happening right now or is it an old fear or worry from when we were young? What does this feeling want to tell us?”

When we practice welcoming all our anxieties and not pushing down our feelings, we can simply enjoy the sunshine, the fresh air, the water, the food on the plate.

A daily practice of mindfulness can be of enormous help. When we begin with awareness of our breath, we bring ourselves to the present moment and are better able to meet whatever comes our way. But don't wait for a crisis before trying to practice transforming anxiety into living more mindfully. If we make mindfulness practice a habit, we will already know what to do when difficulties arise. No longer anxious, we are able to make free and balanced choices for our health and well-being.

Caroline Baerten, RD, (Belgium) is a mindfulness-based registered dietitian, a qualified chef and integrative psychotherapist (i.t) specializing in work with disordered eating behaviors, weight issues and sustainability. She is a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) trainee with the Center for Mindfulness, UMass Medical School (USA). She serves on the TCME Board. www.me-nu.org

COMMUNITY SHARING:

Ask a Mindful Eating Question

This summer, we invited members of our community to pose a question to us on any topic related to mindful eating:



Q: “Often, I’m caught out in my early morning cup of tea. I have tried a lot of things to be more mindful: note cards pinned to lamps or white boards, etc., but still I will catch myself after the fourth cup. I pick up a book or just get lost in thought. I really need help here. I also get terribly uptight afterwards, the “Oh, I’ve done it again!” and so on, the whole stupid cycle I cannot seem to break through. Deep down I know slow, mindful tea drinking and eating is the answer. Please help!”
~ Richard P., Mere Wilts, U.K.

A: Richard, thanks for writing. We are hearing a lot of awareness of your eating habits and behaviors, which is wonderful! We can also hear you share a solution that you want to have work, just slowly drinking some tea and eating. Yet, there is something unspoken that is preventing this from happening. Here is our suggestion.

1. Visit TCME.org, and on the landing page, you will see the WHAT IS MINDFUL EATING box on the right-hand side. Click this box. You will be taken to three resources. Click on the Food for Thought image. This is a book of 31 handouts regarding mindful eating. http://issuu.com/tcme/docs/handouts_combined5.
2. Turn to page 10 and read the handout written by Ronna Kabatznick, PhD. It is titled “Forgiveness.”
3. Practice forgiveness instead of quitting eating mindfully. Again, practice, practice, practice. How can

you practice? Read this handout before you have a cup of tea and a piece of food. If you are willing, make a commitment to do this three times (or before each meal or snack) and see if it is helpful.

Why forgiveness? Forgiveness can be thought of as the broom that sweeps away the guilt and fear that are preventing the wisdom within you from being found. Forgiveness is a powerful tool to help you step into the present moment. Forgiveness can also help you let go of the past or any expectations you may have about food or eating.

Dr. Kabatznick is a mindful eating expert who has helped hundreds of people with her workshops, writing and lectures. If you are a TCME.org member, you can listen to a large number of her recordings, including *Barriers to Mindful Eating*, which may be helpful.

It seems that you are on the right track. Let us know if this suggestion helped you keep going.



Q: “I am looking for resources to help lead small groups discussion on ways to explore Mindful Eating and I would be grateful for any help in finding resources.”

~ Paula J., retired RN, Portland, Ore.

A: Paula, it is great to look for resources for small groups. Have you explored the *Food for Thought Archives*? These 31 handouts regarding mindful eating are available online for free: http://issuu.com/tcme/docs/handouts_combined5.

Have your clients select a handout to read each session or day. After they read the handout, ask the clients to highlight any words or concepts that resonated with them. These highlighted words offer a great place to open discussion. If the group writes in journals, consider writing about the Food for Thought topic. This might include writing about any shifts in thinking regarding why, when, what, how or how much food was eaten.



Be the first to know about our teleconferences, mindful eating trainings, and other events!

Visit our website at:

thecenterformindfuleating.org/upcoming

Learn more about becoming a member of The Center for Mindful Eating at:

thecenterformindfuleating.org/join-us