

TCME *Food for Thought* TCME

A quarterly newsletter from The Center for Mindful Eating

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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 look at how mindful eating might be used to prevent diabetes. Articles include ideas and suggestions from Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE, who explains, "Without awareness, you may discover this fast-paced highway called Life leads directly to diabetes." Jean Kristeller, PhD, creator of MB-EAT-D, helps professionals consider bringing mindfulness into their diabetes education.

"Mindfulness can be introduced both as a relaxation approach, in regard to managing stress, AND as an effective way to learn to make healthier and wiser choices about food and eating." Mary Farhi, MD, says, "When we are in balance, we have energy, efficiency and vitality." Her article is also a patient-care handout.

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.

Preventing Diabetes with Mindful Eating

By Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE

What would happen if people stopped thinking of Type 2 diabetes as a distinct place that can be located by testing blood glucose levels? What would happen if we began to think about diabetes long before a blood test becomes elevated? Asking these questions begins to challenge the black-and-white thinking about diabetes. For most of the 79 million Americans with elevated blood glucose, diabetes doesn't suddenly appear. Research shows blood sugars are elevated seven to 10 years before diabetes develops; this is called prediabetes.

It is easy to miss what is happening in life. People are busy; their attention is focused on other events. The symptoms associated with elevated glucose can be explained away, ignored or

overlooked. Yet, for millions of people all over the world, bringing mindfulness to the situation might be a new solution to this long-standing problem.

To explain how mindfulness works, I ask you to pause for a moment, open your mind, and let go of previous beliefs about diabetes. Take a deep breath and imagine you are driving on a road. The name of this road is Life. For most people, this road of Life can be busy and you are not the only car in sight. For a few lucky people, the road of Life is a quaint country lane that lacks traffic, offering a chance to look at the trees and notice all the beauty that surrounds them.

Another group might experience Life as a superhighway, with three, four or five lanes of fast-moving traffic. Pause for a minute and think, "What type of road would describe my life?"

Using this analogy is a simple way to understand how mindful you can be. If your road is very busy, it makes sense to focus on driving and less on the landscape and sights. If your road is less busy, you might be able to notice more. A lot of people assume that

because they have been driving on this road of Life for 30, 50 or 70 years, they don't need to pay attention. Thoughts like "Oh, I've done this before" or "I do this every day" assume that life is predictable and unchanging. The belief that life is unchanging is the first place mindfulness challenges us. No matter how old you are, life

superhighway, her ability to notice signs and symptoms of elevated glucose will be different from that of the person whose road is a quiet country lane. It is easy to imagine that living a life in the high-speed lane instead of a country road is more stressful. It is this chronic level of stress that often blinds a person to the signs something is

off. For example, are you as active as you were a few years ago? Has any health professional told you that your blood pressure is up or your cholesterol is elevated? These are all signs that your health is changing. Not only does stress blind us, but it also can prompt people to eat. When a person eats in response to stress, foods typically are low-nutrient, high-calorie choices eaten in a mindless way.

Without awareness, you may discover that this fast-paced highway called Life leads directly to diabetes.

So let's review: Stress requires a person to be hypervigilant, which is wearing. Stress often promotes poor food choices. But what you may not realize is that chronic stress can cause blood glucose to rise, leading to the development of diabetes. In fact, stress is linked to many health conditions, including hypertension, heart disease and migraines. If stress is not addressed, it can lead to anxiety, anger and depression. The good



is always new. Each moment is different from the next. Seeing each moment as new is a foundational concept of mindfulness.

If you are thinking, "But..." or "So what?" I ask you to pause again. Seeing something as new opens our eyes to opportunity. It is a quality of thinking that helps people begin to change. Using the road analogy can help a person evaluate how much "new" information he can take. As we said, if a person's road of Life is a high-speed, multilane

news is all of these conditions are helped when a person becomes more mindful. How does mindful eating work? When someone eats mindfully, he chooses to exit the busy highway of Life, find that quaint, quiet country road, and have a small snack or meal. It offers a break from stress, and so much more! By pulling off that multilane highway, you can reorient yourself, take a deep breath, and relax. Leaving the rush-rush highway of Life can help you discover quality food instead of grabbing something from a convenience store or vending machine. You might discover that when eating is enjoyable, and not a high-pressure pit stop, food can do more than nourish you. It can become a pause, when you can begin to notice your own direct experience.

Just like eating, mindfulness isn't something that a person does once and is done with. The benefits of eating a healthy diet and mindfulness happen over time when practiced on a consistent basis. Mindful eating is powerful because it offers a simple behavioral anchor to help a person be mindful. Mindfulness and mindful

eating remind us that we all have the ability to exit this highway at any point. Life does not always have to be lived on the superhighway. There are many ways to get to your destination.

Meals don't need to be a two-minute pit stop. Eating in a more intentional way might just pique your interest in you instead of the task, project or goal that you're focused on. When curiosity is sparked questions naturally arise. Questions focus your attention and may help you notice small changes in health. Questions may make you wonder: "Do I really need to eat in this 'rush-rush' way or can I take a break and enjoy my meal?" You may find that by asking questions, you begin to notice that diabetes doesn't just happen, it has been happening all along.

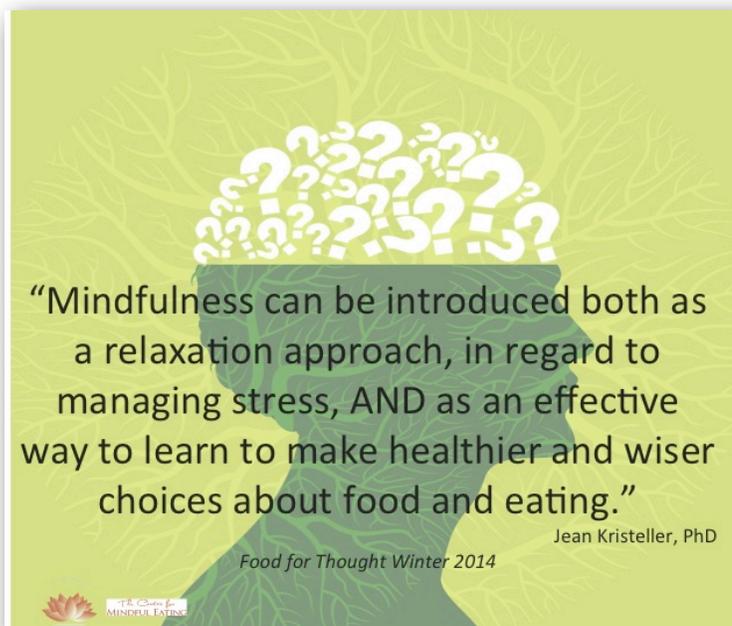
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Practice Suggestions for Preventing and Managing Diabetes

By Jean Kristeller, Ph.D.

Introducing mindfulness and mindful eating to patients with Type 2 diabetes or who are at risk for developing diabetes offers many opportunities. For some individuals, there may be considerable fear regarding their health; they may have begun to view food as "poison," feeling anxious when they eat carbs, worrying about how to negotiate social occasions or eating in restaurants. For others, there may be almost the opposite reaction – a state of denial about the need to be careful about food choices: "After all, I'm not diabetic yet" or "I can just increase my insulin" or "My father weighed more than I do, and he wasn't diabetic." Some individuals may be particularly in need of more effective stress management skills to help even out their psychological and physiological ups and downs.

The following offers some elements to consider in introducing mindfulness practice and mindful eating to your patients challenged by Type 2 diabetes. All these elements were included in an NIH-funded group intervention study (Miller et al., 2012) of Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training for Diabetes (MB-EAT-D) that showed high levels of receptivity, with effects generally equivalent to the Smart



Choices diabetes self-management program. To draw on the analogies offered elsewhere in this newsletter, these exercises reflect steps in learning how to drive the car/the body more effectively and efficiently – and to have more fun at the same time. Mindfulness can be introduced both as a relaxation approach to managing stress AND as an effective way to learn to make healthier and wiser choices about food and eating.

1) Introduce the concept of mindfulness as needed. Many people find it appealing to consider mindfulness as a stress management approach, responding very well to even a few minutes of brief mindfulness practice in the office. This can be reinforced with making available a breath awareness meditation CD or recommendation of an audio file online.

2) At the same time, explain how the concept of mindfulness can be applied to eating. The most effective way to introduce this is to lead the individual through a brief mindful eating practice, using 3 or 4 raisins, as in the MBSR program or the MB-EAT program. This can be introduced in the same session as the basic mindfulness practice

or separately. Encourage the individual to practice this experience of mindful eating at home, again with raisins, or a similar simple food.

3) For the next session, ask the individual to bring a snack food that might be somewhat challenging, and again practice eating this food mindfully in the session. The nutritional value – and challenges – of this food can also be used to illustrate balanced choice in managing blood sugar levels: A small amount may be fine, but a larger amount would cause a problem.

4) Gradually, over several sessions, continue to introduce what I refer to as “inner wisdom”: tuning in to levels of physical hunger vs. other triggers to eat; noticing how fullness develops during a meal; fully tasting food to draw as much enjoyment as possible from smaller amounts.

5) At the same time – or in separate sessions – introduce the concepts of “outer wisdom”: how to manage complex choices in types of food, and amounts of food, to meet both health needs AND personal preferences, cultural uses of food for enjoyment and celebration, and family pressures

on food selection. Food can gradually shift from “food as poison” to “food as medicine” while encouraging individuals to retain and cultivate enjoyment and satisfaction from whatever they eat.

Suggesting to patients a resource such as May & Fletcher’s “Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat with Diabetes” can also be very helpful in conveying the broad principles for creating a far different and far more satisfying relationship to eating and food.

Miller, C., Kristeller, JL, Headings, A, Nagaraja, H, Miser, WF. (2012). Comparative effectiveness of a mindful eating intervention to a diabetes self-management intervention among adults with Type 2 diabetes: A pilot study. Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 112, 1835 – 1842.

Jean Kristeller, Ph.D., is a psychologist at Indiana State University, who developed the MB-EAT program. With Carla Miller, PhD, RD, at Ohio State University, this has been adapted to individuals with Type 2 diabetes. She can be reached at

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Our Mission

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. Accomplished 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.

Keeping Our Bodies In Balance

By Mary Farhi, MD

A system in balance runs efficiently and effectively. Think of tuning up your car and changing the oil, which results in improved gas mileage. Our bodies are no different. When we are in balance we have energy, efficiency and vitality. When we are out of balance we have “dis-ease” and inefficiency. Let’s consider Type 2 diabetes as an example. Once an individual has a certain lab value criterion we then name it Type 2 diabetes and develop a treatment plan. But Type 2 diabetes does not just happen.

We will show signs of insulin resistance, which is an example of a system out of balance. Are we paying attention when our bodies try to communicate?

There are many signs and symptoms of a system that is overworked and out of balance. Yet we might not pay attention to those signs. Think of an overheated engine. We would see the temperature gauge go up, perhaps even see some smoke.

Well, often our bodies are overheated and sending us “smoke signals.” These may be signs of

insulin resistance and may include irregular menstrual cycles in a woman who has polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), fatigue, difficulty losing weight or hot flashes and night sweats. These are just a few examples of our body’s communication that we are out of balance.



So how do we back up or reverse the progression of insulin resistance to Type 2 diabetes? This is where mindfulness and mindful eating come in. Pay attention to how we feel physically and emotionally on a daily basis as well as while we are eating and after eating. Do we feel vital and energized? Or do we feel as though we are in a “food coma” and need to lie down after eating? We need to listen to our engine, our body. Are we using high octane gas that makes the engine run smoothly or cheap gas that makes our engine knock? Be mindful while we eat as well as

afterward of how we feel mentally AND physically.

So what can we do? One way to begin to dialogue with ourselves is to keep a food diary and include not only what we eat but also why we eat. Record how we feel before and after eating, both physically and emotionally.

Perhaps we can begin to shift our focus from treating “dis-ease” to creating wellness and vitality from within. Change the oil and rotate the tires on a regular basis. Be in the moment and listen to our body and be mindful of how we are supporting our body, both physically and emotionally. There is no ONE perfect diet for everyone. Yet each

person can begin to dialogue and listen to what best supports her individual body and encourages resiliency, vitality and wellness. Let food be thy medicine.

Mary Farhi, MD, ABIHM, FACOG, RYT, a TCME Board member, practices integrative and holistic gynecology focusing on hormonal balance and weight management at Midwest Center for Women’s Healthcare in Arlington Heights, Ill. She is a certified yoga and Mighty Body Band instructor and teaches at Illinois Bone and Joint (IBJI) in Highland Park, Ill. Dr Farhi has completed training for clinicians in both Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindful Eating. Dr Farhi can be reached at info@drmaryfarhi.com.