

BASICS of Mindful Eating



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BASICS is an acronym for a complete set of guidelines that walks you through the eating process from beginning to end. These are not rules and you don't need to be perfect at them. However, practicing the BASICS could change the way you eat forever.

B – Breathe and belly check for hunger and satiety before you eat.

Take a few deep breaths and relax the body. As you're doing this, check in with your belly. Are there sensations of physical hunger? How hungry are you? What are you hungry for? You might want food. You might be thirsty. You might be hungry for something entirely different than food. Listen to what your body is telling you. General rule: Eat when you're hungry; don't eat when you're not hungry.

A - Assess your food

What does it look like? Does it look appealing? What does it smell like? Where does it come from? Is it a food you can recognize, or is it so highly processed you don't know what it is? Is this the food you really want? As you take your first bite and continue to eat, reassess your food to see if your first impressions were correct and you really want to keep eating.

S - Slow down

Slowing down while you are eating helps you be aware of when the body's



physical hunger is satisfied. Slowing down can also help you enjoy your food more fully. Simple methods to help you slow down include putting down your fork or spoon between bites, pausing and taking a breath between bites, and chewing your food completely.

I - Investigate your hunger throughout the meal, particularly half-way through

To be a mindful eater, it is important to be aware of your distractions and to keep bringing your attention back to eating, tasting, and assessing your hunger and satiety throughout the meal. In particular, half-way through the meal, you may discover you are no longer hungry, or you no longer find the food appealing, even though there is still food on your

plate. Give yourself permission to stop or to continue based on how hungry you are, not old rules like "you need to clean your plate."

C - Chew your food thoroughly

Notice the variety of tastes registered inside your mouth and if you're enjoying what you're eating. Notice what happens to the food as you chew. How long does it take to thoroughly chew your food before you swallow it? As you continue to chew and swallow, can you sense hunger beginning to dissipate? Chew each bite thoroughly before you move onto the next.

S - Savor your food

Savoring your food means taking time to choose food that honors your taste buds and your body. Savoring your food happens when you are fully present for the experience of eating and the pleasure that it can bring. If you really like it, experience the joy of savoring.

Lynn Rossy is a health psychologist and author of "The Mindfulness-Based Eating Solution." She developed and teaches the empirically-validated 10-week mindful eating program called "Eat for Life." She is a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction teacher and serves on the TCME board. She welcomes comments on this article. She can be reached at www.LynnRossy.com and MindfulRossy@gmail.com.

A Mindful Meal or Snack Meditation

Choose a time when you would normally eat a meal or a snack. Practice bringing kindness to yourself, mindful openness and curiosity to the practice of mindful eating.

Before eating, bring awareness to your body and your breathing. Let your belly be soft and full. Take three full deep breaths. Let the breath relax you and help you settle into the present moment. Start by checking in to see how hungry you are. Explore what hunger feels like in the belly, noticing its pleasant and unpleasant qualities. Notice the sensations in the mouth and in the belly that occur with the mere thought of eating.

If you haven't chosen food to eat yet, check in to see what would taste good right now. Can you get a sense of what the body would like to eat, or what tastes would be pleasing to you? Once you have your food in front of you, take some time to assess it. What does it look like? What is the color and shape? Where did it come from? How nourishing do you think it is? What does it smell like? Acknowledge the importance of food for your body's health.

When you eat, can you take your time? You can slow down by chewing your food thoroughly and by putting down your fork or spoon between bites. Watch any distractions or thoughts, let them come and go. Keep coming back to the sensations involved in eating and tasting.

As you eat, notice whether you are



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enjoying the food or not. Focus on the sensations of taste—sweet, sour, salty, pungent. Keep coming back to the taste of your food. If you notice you aren't enjoying it, can you stop eating? If you enjoy it, how present are you for the pleasure of the experience. Savor your food.

Throughout the meal, notice how your hunger level moves toward feeling satisfied. Particularly half-way through, stop and assess where your hunger level is again. If you're hungry, continue to eat. But if you notice a sense of satisfaction, stop. Notice if it is difficult to stop at this point and inquire as to why. Give yourself permission to stop, even if there is some food left on the plate. Remind yourself that you can always have more later.

What thoughts and emotions are

present as you eat and as you decide to stop? What beliefs and stories do you tell yourself about food and eating?

Be present for the last bite as fully as you were for the first bite. And if you eat more than enough, or feel too full, know that you have not blown it, but that you are simply now aware of this fullness. It takes time to learn new ways of eating. Every time you eat is a time to practice again.

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