Mindful Movement: Enhancing Ease and Joy
Sometimes we need to stretch ourselves to bring mindful eating deeper into our lives. In this issue of Food for Thought, “Mindful Movement: Enhancing Ease and Joy,” we will explore the role of yoga and its relationship to mindful eating.

We are so happy to welcome our guest writer, Beth Cotter, who offers us the latest research on the benefits of yoga as part of the treatment for binge-eating disorder. “Upon starting the [yoga] program,” she writes, “participants reflected that mindful eating was the opposite of their original urge to disconnect while eating – either by distraction, multitasking, or binging.” The research linking the benefits of movement and mindful eating showed that “participants revealed that yoga led to feelings of “physical ease.” Participants noticed that practicing yoga did not feel like they thought exercise was “supposed to feel.”

Reading this just make us want to get up and move our bodies and discover what movements feel delicious! Dr. Lynn Rossy writes about how to savor movement. “To move in ways that feel delicious, you have to bring your full attention to your bodily sensations.” What better way to do that than with gentle yoga, a mindful walk, an intentional stretch.

Yoga isn’t just for adults. Dr. Claudia Vega shares her gratifying experience teaching children yoga and mindful eating. “In my experience, children like yoga because it is fun and challenging, yet safe.”

Thank you again for your interest in, and support for, The Center for Mindful Eating. We are delighted to share these articles, news about The Center and the wisdom of our members. We hope you will continue the conversation by joining us on Facebook, signing up for Mindful Bytes (our free e-newsletter), attending a webinar, or becoming a member.
Have you ever eaten past the point of being comfortably full, perhaps during a special occasion or holiday celebration? Or have you ever gone for a second helping of food, when you were already feeling full? Oscar Wilde’s idea of “everything in moderation, including moderation,” applies to so-called normal eating, -- when that occasional overeating is all part of a balanced lifestyle. An important line to draw, though, is when overeating becomes a frequent distraction from everyday life. This line is the difference between overeating and binge eating.

While overeating may occur at times for the healthy eater, a person with Binge Eating Disorder (BED) has recurring episodes of eating past the point of fullness, which often leads to physical and emotional distress. In May 2013, Binge Eating Disorder was added by the American Psychiatric Association to the DSM-V2. In the DSM-V, BED is characterized by having recurrent episodes of binge eating, evident distress regarding binge eating, the absence of any compensatory behaviors (such as purging), and a combination of the following: eating until feeling uncomfortably full, eating more rapidly than normal, eating large amounts of food when not feeling hungry, eating alone, and feeling disgusted, depressed or guilty after overeating.

From a psychological perspective, Jean Kristeller (2010) reports that “BED is often marked by using food to handle emotional distress … eating, food, and body weight typically play disproportionate roles as aspects of self-identity.” Similarly, Shane McIver (2009) summarizes the issue this way: “Binge eating provides a way to deal with the emotional discontent that arises from the unnerving dissonance between what one wishes to feel (comfort) and what is actually felt (discomfort).” For these reasons, BED is a medical condition that requires medical intervention, and support from a multidisciplinary team of professionals, including psychiatrists, therapists, nurses and dietitians.

A number of well-recognized treatment methods for Binge Eating Disorder are cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Amid a culture with a budding interest in meditation and mindfulness, there is an exciting field of research evolving that examines the use of mindfulness and acceptance-based approaches in the treatment of eating disorders. Mindfulness-based eating awareness training (MB-EAT) and mindfulness-based yoga therapy are two examples of this evolving field.

Hoping that insight into the personal experiences of women who practiced yoga as an approach to Binge Eating Disorder treatment will encourage curiosity in the field, I have summarized continued on page 4
The impact of yoga
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the details of a creative qualitative study from the Qualitative Health Research Journal that examines the use of yoga in the treatment of binge eating.

The study analyzes the journal entries of 25 obese women (average age 42, average BMI 35.6) with self-reported problems with binge eating, all of whom participated in a 12-week yoga treatment program. The focus of the yoga program was to help participants develop daily yoga practice through physical awareness of their body, breath awareness, and concentrative meditation (including mindful eating). The primary focus of this study was to “provide a description of lived experience” and learn from those directly involved in the intervention.

So what did they learn? Through the course of the 12-week program (comprised of 1 hour/week guided yoga and a CD with 30-minute guided yoga to perform at home), McIver and his team found that participants expressed a shift, from feeling “distracted and physically absent,” to feeling “focused and physically present.” The participants reported that they started the practice from a place of complete disconnection to their bodies, and observed a transition into a state of renewed connection with their bodies.

Although such a change is profound, one could imagine how initial feelings may have been very unsettling for the participants. The yoga practice brought awareness to this preliminary disconnection from their bodies, and shed light on “perceived problems that were allowed to develop because of feeling disconnected from oneself over a period of time.” This deep understanding required a period of grief, followed by acceptance.

Throughout the program, researchers found that the participants’ relationships with food were summarized by two major themes: A changing body and a changing palate.

The changing body

Yoga practice was initially met with some negativity, as participants reflected on their past experiences with exercise. But in contrast to previous exercise messages of “force or failure,” participants revealed that yoga led to feelings of “physical ease.” Participants noticed that practicing yoga did not feel like they thought exercise was “supposed to feel.” The initial negative feelings changed to feelings of being more flexible, long and lean, and more guided to heal a fractured relationship with the body.

The changing palate

After studying the participants’ journals, a theme of “disconnection toward connection” was observed in regard to the participants’ relationships with food. Upon starting the program, participants reflected that mindful eating was the opposite of their original urge to disconnect while eating — either by distraction, multitasking, or binging. Slowing down their pace of eating was difficult, and was met with anxiety. One woman wrote in her journal, “my relationship with food is more intense than my relationship with anything or anyone else. It’s the antidote to my pain; well, in the short term, at least.” Within a month, this disconnection turned into a fledging connection, wherein there was an awareness of old patterns and an increased understanding of the link between “what is eaten, and how one feels as a result.” Finally, a strong connection developed in which hunger and satiety cues were respected and smaller portions were eaten at regular intervals (to assist metabolism). A new calmness about food surfaced.

Overall, the study showed that participating in yoga and mindful eating improved eating awareness over time. This increased awareness resulted in a reduction in the quantity of food consumed at one sitting, a slower pace of eating, and experimentation with incorporating a greater variety of food choices beyond comfort foods.

Participants even reported an ability to leave food on their plate — which proved to be a major accomplishment in regard to giving into hunger cues and internal wisdom.

So what does this all mean? As practitioners interested in bringing mindful eating and meditative practices to the field, how can we use this information? This study demonstrates there is evidence for including meditation-based practices into programs geared toward individuals who binge eat. It stresses the impact of shifting the focus away from weight loss and fad dieting. It encourages the conversation about health to include a person’s well being, connection to their internal wisdom, and freedom to explore their body’s emotional and physical strength. Maybe by shifting the conversation away from weight loss and toward greater personal understanding, we can affect both healthy and long-lasting behavior change.

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Resources:
It is not news that yoga is a very popular discipline. We find yoga studios pretty much everywhere. We can also buy books, magazines and DVD’s, or pay monthly online subscriptions to practice at home. According to a joint survey by the National Institute of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, nearly 10% of U.S. adults practiced yoga in 2012. This was up from 5% a decade earlier.

But the benefits of yoga are not just for adults. Children and teens practice yoga, as well. Studies show that high school students who take a yoga class three times a week have improved moods. Also, anxiety has been shown to decrease among younger children who practice yoga.

In my experience as a yoga instructor, (I teach yoga to school-age children), the benefits are many. The children tell me they like yoga because it is fun and challenging. It is also safe. They enjoy it because it is not competitive. Instead, they have a personal desire to improve their practice. When yoga is taught in a friendly environment, children enjoy learning together.

As children tell me, yoga helps them focus their bodies and minds. By paying attention to the physical sensations of their bodies, they become aware of their capacities as well as their limits.

As children report, yoga helps them focus on their bodies and minds. By paying attention to the physical sensations of their bodies, they become aware of their capacities as well as their limits.

What I love most about teaching yoga to children is the openness and willingness with which they approach the class. Most of them are inclined to explore and practice. I think children are natural-born yogis, curious and eager to learn. And by the end of the session, they can be guided to relax. Even the ones who fidget can find their way through to relaxation. I aid them with a visualization or storytelling.

What I have learned is that in practicing yoga with kids, we have to maintain an open mind and heart. We must be ready to change any agenda we had planned, flow with them, play and enjoy them. As their instructors, we also need to be attentive to their movements, guiding them in a way that ensures they do not injure themselves. Yoga truly becomes a bond between us. The beauty of this practice is that it is available to anyone who wants to give it a try. One stretch, one breath, a continuous flow of life. Namaste!

Claudia Vega, MD, M.S.– is a Pediatrician, Mindfulness Based-Nutritionist and Psychotherapist, specializing in the work with disordered eating and weight issues with children and adolescents and their families. She serves on the TCME board. She leads Mindful Eating workshops and retreats for children, teenagers and adults. www.nutrintegra.com
Wait a Minute... The Center for Mindful Eating is Celebrating its 10th Anniversary?

Megrette Fletcher  
MEd, RD, CDE

You might have heard: We are having a party! It is quite the milestone for me. I remember the fear I had in my stomach when Donald Altman (who became one of TCME’s founding members) returned my call. His presence was calm, gentle, and so sweet as I nervously explained the idea that burned in my heart. I longed to create a nonprofit organization that blended mindfulness with eating. When he agreed it was a good idea, I knew then it was the start of something amazing. That moment of both fear and joy has been etched in my mind.

It took a year for The Center for Mindful Eating to move from an idea to an actual nonprofit. There were many steps and much help along the way, which is why it is rather auspicious for us to now be celebrating our 10th anniversary!

A lot of people assume that TCME was started by a large grant or a generous donation. They are unaware of its humble beginnings; or that TCME is comprised completely of a volunteer board, whose members have donated both financial support and countless hours toward this organization.

There has been a lot of work to build the Center, and in the 10 years since it was founded, it has been amazing to see all that has been accomplished. We were curious about which achievement people think has been the most helpful:

• Is it the development and distribution of the Principles of Mindful Eating?
• Is it our vision -- which is to be an effective, accessible vehicle for training professionals in the principles and practices of mindful eating; to foster wisdom, mindfulness about food and eating, and ethical action in education, policy, research, and healthcare?
• Is it our mission -- to help people achieve a balanced, respectful, healthy and joyful relationship with food and eating? By providing an easily accessible source of information, as well as opportunities to interact (via our website and in other ways), we seek to train and encourage professionals who can then foster this capacity in others.
• Is it the recently developed Good Practice Guidelines? Or the Center’s Position Statements on Healthy Eating, Sustainable Food Systems, Food Security, Meditation or Healthy Weight?
• Is it the success of our first auction, which helped raise necessary funds to keep TCME operational? (We now have more than 100,000 visitors annually to our website.)
• Or is it the first Mindful Eating Day, which attracted more than 1,200 people around the world to meet and explore the idea of mindfulness and eating?

While all of these have been helpful, the truth is, none of these accomplishments are what we want to celebrate. The Center for Mindful Eating is celebrating ten years of support from people like you! THANK YOU!

It sure is exciting to see TCME grow from a humble idea discussed at a kitchen table, to a global nonprofit with worldwide membership. It is exciting to realize that there is an alternative to food judgment and restrictive eating patterns!

TCME’s continued success depends on membership. Our members provide us more than 90% of our operating budget. Your membership is a pledge of support for the services TCME offers for professional and personal use. This promise can be made even stronger by choosing to become a Lifetime Member. For one year, during our 10th anniversary, The Center for Mindful Eating will offer a limited number of Lifetime Memberships. These memberships will help boost the resources available to our growing global community. When you become a member, you are joining a forum for people from all disciplines interested in developing, deepening and understanding the value and importance of mindful eating.

We hope you will enjoy our year-long celebration. Thank you again for your interest and support of mindful eating.

Thank you to the many volunteers who have helped The Center for Mindful Eating achieve this celebratory milestone! We would like to acknowledge all of the individuals who have served on the Board of Directors. It is your vision and inspiration that we carry forward! Thank you!
To savor delicious food, you have to pay attention to how it tastes. To move in ways that feel delicious, you have to bring your full attention to your bodily sensations. Whether you enjoy exercising or not, mindfulness can make the experience of moving your body a pleasurable one.

There can be some resistance to paying attention to your body, particularly if you and your body aren’t exactly on friendly terms. You may be unhappy with your body for the way it looks, the way it feels, or for not living up to your expectations. You might think you’re too busy to pay attention to the body and its needs for movement. Exercise may conjure up visions of the gym, being miserable doing some activity you don’t like, being around people who make you feel self-conscious (muscle-bound men and women in spandex), or being in pain. Using exercise exclusively for weight loss takes the pleasure out of the activity because the focus is on something besides how it makes you feel inside.

The three most important things you can do to make physical activity a delicious part of your life are to find something you really enjoy. If you can’t enjoy it, you won’t continue to do it over the long term. Remember to ease into any new activity, even if it is as simple as walking, so that you don’t injure yourself. Injuries definitely take the pleasure out of an activity. A little bit of movement scattered throughout your day is as good as a long workout at the end of the day.

Be Present

The more present you are, the more likely you will be able to experience movement that feels delicious. Be present with all of the sensations available to you. Let your body tell you when to do more and when to do less. Exercise doesn’t have to be painful to be good for you. Find ways of moving your body that feel delightful, without pain.

Visualize Yourself as an Active Person

There will be days when you won’t feel like getting your shoes on and going out for a walk or whatever activity you regularly choose to do. But if you have the vision of yourself as someone who is physically active, there is something almost magical that happens. You don’t have to feel like doing it before you start. You don’t have to wait to hear, “Oh boy, I get to go take a walk.” On those days when your mind says, “I don’t feel like it,” the knowledge that you view yourself as someone who values exercise kicks in and you do it anyway. The deliciousness of the activity will soon have you engaged and enjoying it.

Lynn Rossy, PhD, is a health psychologist at the University of Missouri, specializing in mindfulness-based interventions for eating and living with ease. She developed a 10-week mindful eating program called Eat for Life. Contact her at RossyL@umsystem.edu.
COMMUNITY WISDOM:

We asked our members to reflect on our theme of mindful movement in their personal lives and professional practice.

What is your favorite mindful movement activity? Why do you enjoy this activity?

“Yoga helps me feel more together when work, home and other demands pull me in different directions.” ~ Marianela Medrano, PhD, LPC, CPT, Stamford, CT, USA

“Yoga and/or dance to loud, upbeat music. I love the vibration from the music that passes through me and inspires movement and emotion.” ~ Yvette Ladd, Pharmacist/Yoga therapist, Hillsville, VA, USA

“Mindful stretching brings a feeling of calm and presence. Mindful dancing engenders feelings of vibrance, peace and a quiet joy.” ~ Rochelle Jaffe, M.S. Ashland, Oregon, USA

“Walking in nature. It supports me in “feeling heaven to earth” while being grounded.” ~ Carla, Noblesville, IN USA

“Walking my dog in the woods. I find her joy of being outside motivates me to walk.” ~ Megrette Fletcher, Dover, NH, USA

What challenges arise for your clients as they contemplate or begin mindful movement?

“Mindful movement in the form of walking meditation can bring up some challenges specifically the question, ‘Am I doing it right?’” ~ Lisa Rigau MS, BSN, Waverly Township, USA

“People with eating issues often don’t think of or feel themselves as active... and don’t have many experiences of enjoying movement. Often movement has been a ‘should’...” ~ Rochelle Jaffe, M.S., Ashland, Oregon, USA

“...they find it strange , but it takes time to settle down and let the natural flow come.” ~ Christine Gogniat Droz, Dietitian, Switzerland

“They are afraid that they have to be “good” at it.” ~ Maare Kauppinen, Helsinki, Finland

How do you help your clients shift from exercise drudgery to delicious movement?

“I start out having them do movement from right where they are sitting. Very gentle movements with the arms and legs, gentle twist and breathing awareness.” ~ Jemme Bethune Steward APRN, LPC, RYT, South Carolina, USA

“I invite them to be aware of how it feels to have a body in motion.” ~ Marianela Medrano, PhD, LPC, CPT, Stamford, CT, USA

“Tell yourself you can do this new exercise at least three times before you decide it’s not for you. Ultimate goal is to find a variety of things you enjoy doing and can do regularly.” ~ Patricia Cole, Peoria, IL, USA

“Suggest they be curious why they are resisting and then we address those limiting beliefs. Suggest they do an exercise they love and will do, not something they feel is a “should do.” ~ Carla, Noblesville, IN USA

“Start small, bargain for a five minute practice of one or two restorative asana and build from there.” ~ Catharine Vitale, Austin, TX, USA

“discuss specifics on which activities they can easily and joyfully incorporate, help look into the particulars of their schedule (when ready) and insert time to experiment with desired activities.” ~ Karen Klimczak RD, Avon, CT, USA

“Having activities and suggestions that feature all body types is also helpful. I have pulled articles from magazines and websites that promote exercise and size diversity. It is very empowering.” ~ Megrette Fletcher, Dover, NH, USA

“Guidance to ignore my instruction if not appropriate for them, close their eyes (if safe to do so), and aim to be in the moment without an end goal. Move for movement/moment’s sake!” ~ Yasmin Zaman, Mindfulness Teacher, Southampton, England, UK

“For me it’s all about helping them shift perspective and finding out what kind of exercise gives them joy.” ~ Linn Thorstenssøn, Nutritional Therapist, Cork, Ireland

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