

## **Mindful Eating for Moms**

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Many things occur when we eat mindfully. First, we're aware of how much we are eating. We're more in tune with our body signals which tell us when to eat, how much to eat and when our bodies have had enough. As a result, we tend to overeat less often because we are paying closer attention to what our bodies need. Our bodies are determining when to eat as opposed to the event, the clock or the show on TV.

Another benefit of eating mindfully is that we're able to more fully enjoy our food because we are focused on the flavor, texture, aroma, presentation and atmosphere, which surround us and the food we're eating. Our meals are more satisfying and enjoyable, which makes it easier to end the meal without that unfulfilled feeling which keeps us searching for more. One of the most effective ways to do this is to eat slowly, sitting down and concentrating on the taste of what you're eating.

For many moms however, sitting down to a meal may be a rare treat. By sitting down to a meal, many things happen. First you're becoming more aware of the amount, type and reasons why you're eating. The second positive outcome is better digestion. Your food has an opportunity to be chewed, absorbed and digested more fully so you get the benefit of the nutrients you're taking in. Lastly, by eating mindfully you're sending an important message to yourself and others that you are worthy and deserving of some much needed self-care. You are treating yourself with some kindness and respect which overflows to all those around you.

Picture a beautifully set table with candles, china and sparkling silverware. Music is playing softly in the background, it was an easy day with the kids, the food looks delicious, you're hungry for your dinner and you casually stroll to the table for your exquisitely prepared meal. Sounds like it's not that difficult to eat mindfully in this type of scenario, right? Now back to reality. You're running late and grab something to go, the kids are screaming, the dog is barking, the phone is ringing and the kids are starving NOW! Here's your perfect scenario for mindless munching. Another may be when you're able to catch a quick break and grab a bag of something crunchy while you read the newspaper, or when your hectic day is behind you and all you want to do is stare at the TV with a bowl of ice cream in your lap.

To eat mindfully, awareness comes first. You first need to catch yourself eating when you're not hungry. So often we eat mindlessly when we're passing food to others, making snacks for the kids, preparing dinner, walking past the candy dish at work, reading or watching TV. We may even find

ourselves looking to eat when we have a few minutes to spare before our next activity and use food as a way to kill some extra time. Sometimes we may wander into the kitchen, open up the cabinets and wonder why we're even there! This is different than emotional eating where food is used as a coping mechanism offering quick relief or a way to help control your emotional pain. This is mindless eating where distractions and a lack of awareness cause you to take in food when you're not hungry. What can you do?

With greater awareness, you learn more about what you need. When you've learned what your specific needs are, you can work towards solutions, which satisfy those needs. So, first stop and ask yourself why you're eating. Believe it or not, you may not even realize you had anything in your hand or your mouth. Ask yourself if you could possibly be thirsty instead. Our thirst mechanism doesn't always work effectively. We often think we're hungry when we are in fact, thirsty. Next, ask yourself what you really need. If you're bored, you need something to do. If you don't know what you're feeling, you need to figure that out too.

If you're eating just because the food is there, here are a few tricks you can try. One is to chew gum. If you just want to keep your mouth busy, gum may satisfy that oral need. You can also drink a glass of water or crunch on some vegetables with low fat dip. Another trick is to use the opportunity to whiten your teeth and put on a strip of tooth whitener. You can't eat for 30 minutes when they're on so you can spare yourself unnecessary calories while brightening your teeth!

You may find it helpful to keep your hands busy as well. Find things that make it difficult to use your hands for eating by putting on a coat of nail polish, rubbing creamy scented lotion on your hands, knitting or even wearing rubber kitchen gloves! You can even try putting on that bitter tasting nail polish designed to help you stop biting your nails. It acts as a quick reminder not to eat while helping your nails become long and beautiful!

Another trick is to find something to do such as brush the dog's fur, clean a drawer or sort through the mail. There are also visualizations you can try. Here's one thing you can picture to give you a better idea of how much you're eating. Picture a regular sized plate. Now picture that plate with all of the snacks, bites and treats you grabbed mindlessly. Put on the plate every thing you grabbed when you walked by the candy dish, ate standing up, when you were preparing dinner, talking (and chewing) on the phone, feeding the kids or watching TV. How does the plate look, is it overflowing?

Ending your habit of eating mindlessly takes patience and practice. It's about finding the strategies that work best for you, then applying them when you need it most. Food is meant to be delicious

and it's meant to be enjoyed. But in order to get the most satisfaction, flavor and benefit from what we take in, we need to eat every bite with a keen awareness of what we're doing and why exactly we're doing it.



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