

BRAINY GUPSHUP

COUNSELLING DEPARTMENT

Dear Parents

Can I invite you to visualize yourself in this scenario:...

You're at your computer facing a wall of e-mails. After composing a reply, you hit "send" and reach for that paneer wrap on your desk. After a few bites, chewing while glancing at the screen, you set the wrap down, grab a handful of chips, and open the next message. Before you know it, you've finished lunch without even noticing it.

Hmm.. does this sound familiar to you?



In our practice, we notice that most people spend a good portion of their waking hours distracted from the present moment by their thoughts and feelings. When we eat, our focus could be on the internet, TV, mobile phone, etc., limiting our ability to be fully present and joyful in the eating experience.

Consequently, our limited ability to be conscious of what we eat could lead to weight gain and poor nutrition. This could be one of the primary causes of lifestyle disorders like diabetes, obesity, PCOD, and metabolic and cardiac difficulties, leading to functional struggles.

Nevertheless, the good news is that all this is preventable. We could become more mindful of what we consume, thereby creating good eating practices at home for ourselves and our family.

What is Mindful Eating?

To understand this concept, let's immerse ourselves in the experience of mindful eating.

Think of the first bite of the food you love... maybe it is a piece of chocolate. You have been looking forward to enjoying it, and you begin to think of the taste of the chocolate as you unfold the wrapper. You bite into it and are totally immersed in its sweetness, richness, and smoothness. It is delicious, and you are simply happy to be eating it.



There are no goals to eating mindfully other than to be in the present moment as you eat. Further, mindful eating is not about what you think, but rather what you experience such as the taste of the food, the smell, the look of the food, etc.

So when we eat mindfully, we are not thinking about the smell or taste - instead we are immersed in experiencing the smell and the taste.

mindLESS eating
eating on autopilot
eating in front of the TV, computer, while driving, etc.
relying on external VS internal clues: clean plate, empty package
EATING JUST BECAUSE IT'S THERE!
People who ate from clear dishes ate 71% more than those who ate from white dishes.
People ate 53% more popcorn from large buckets than from small buckets. (even though the popcorn was STALE!)

mindFUL eating
Don't skip meals! Ignoring hunger can lead to overeating.
More bang for your buck: Protein and healthy fats keep you fuller for longer!
Have a plan: know when and where to grab healthy options
CHOOSE SATISFYING SNACKS THAT INCLUDE PROTEIN!
Whole grain crackers, Cheese, Carrots & veggies with hummus, Yogurt with granola, Eggs, Apples & Fruits

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We propose four central ideas for Mindful Eating

- 1.EATING THE RAINBOW
- 2.SEVEN PRACTICES OF MINDFUL EATING
- 3.LISTENING TO YOUR BODY
- 4.A FAMILY THAT EATS TOGETHER STAYS TOGETHER
- 5.GRATITUDE

1. EATING THE RAINBOW



As we approach the summer breaks, the Rainbow diet is something that we can practice at home. Most colorful fruits and veggies have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects that may benefit different aspects of your health. Plant foods contain thousands of natural compounds called phytonutrients, which have anti-inflammatory benefits. For instance, blue and purple foods, including blueberries, have a high content of the plant pigment anthocyanin, which has been linked to lowering the risk of heart disease and type two diabetes. Flavones,

which gives foods a yellow color, and may reduce the risk of heart disease. Having all colors in our diet consciously increases the chances of having a balanced diet and a rich diversity of foods to choose from.

2. SEVEN PRACTICES OF MINDFUL EATING

Thich Nhat Hanh, a venerable Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master speaks about Mindful eating as a practice. With the energy of mindfulness, even eating can become sacred, providing a deep appreciation of all that went into the meal's creation and how Mother Earth provides such bounty to us. Quoting him "When we eat our meal, we should show up to the meal 100%" He shares certain doable strategies and the seven practices of mindful eating.

From SAVOR: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life

- **Honor the food:** we eat with our phones in our hands or while staring at our computer screen. To eat mindfully we can put away our devices and carve out some time just to eat. Acknowledge where the food was grown and who prepared the meal. This also adds a lot of gratitude for the food we eat and value the journey of the food from the farm to our plate.
- **Engage all senses:** Food is an incredibly sensuous experience of colors, textures, smell, and taste. But often the demands of day-to-day life mean we skip past the joys involved in eating. Pausing periodically to engage these senses brings all these senses' focus back on the food we eat.
- **Serve in modest portions:** This can help avoid overeating and food wastage. Using a dinner plate no larger than 9 inches across and filling first a little could always be a good beginning. Taking a little of everything and modestly helps in paying attention while serving ourselves the food we wish to eat.
- **Savor small bites, and chew thoroughly:** The above three practices can help slow down the meal and fully experience the food's flavors.
- **Don't skip meals:** Going too long without eating increases the risk of strong hunger, which may lead to the quickest and easiest food choice, and perhaps not always a healthy one. Setting meals at around the same time each day, as well as planning for enough time to enjoy a meal or snack reduces these risks.



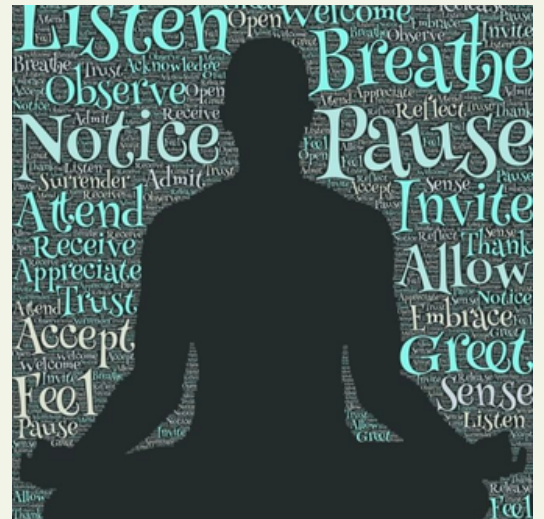
- **Eat slowly to avoid overeating:** If we slow down, savor our food and really notice the sensation in our mouth, we can feel very satisfied with our food while eating less. We will also be more aware that our body has had enough.

- **Eat a plant-based diet, for health and for the planet:** Processed meat and saturated fat are associated with an increased risk of colon cancer and heart disease. Also, the production of animal-based foods like meat and dairy takes a heavier toll on our environment than plant-based foods. Focusing on the practice would help not only conserve precious land and freshwater supplies but also provide us with the food systems that nourish our minds and body in a wholesome manner.

3. LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

We human beings have many feelings. They can be positive or negative. Examples of positive emotions include love, joy, and hope; and examples of negative emotions include fear, anger, anxiety, and grief.

For many people, emotions are closely tied to food. Some people tend to eat more when they are joyful, while others tend to eat less. If we do not attempt to look deeply to understand our cravings, it will grow and we will form unhealthy habits. It is important to check "Are you eating in response to hunger signals or are you eating in response to an emotional signal?"



Pausing and Reflecting ...

Perhaps you can take a few deep breaths before eating a meal or snack to quietly contemplate what is it you are feeling and what is it that would become a part of you and your body.

It could also steal that moment to wonder - what are my comfy foods and how does it help me?

Perhaps also putting healthy foods in a convenient place like on the counter and placing treats out of view could help. Research indicates that people tend to eat what is within their immediate reach- the notion being “In sight- in mind; out of sight- out of mind.”

4. A FAMILY THAT EATS TOGETHER STAYS TOGETHER

From the moment we are born food and mother come together for the newborn child. As we grow older, food cannot be separated from the idea of family. And as we grow spiritually and culturally, we only deepen our understanding that family includes all of humanity and all of nature.

Relationships with food and the environment in which families eat and live impact how they eat and how they feel about themselves. When family members feel secure and loved, they're better able to pay attention to their bodies. Happy and congenial family structures, joyful food shopping, positive thoughts while cooking, and eating together go a long way to truly enjoying what is cooked and relished. Encouraging children in food selection, purchase, cooking, serving, and eating from a very young age helps them subconsciously develop healthy eating habits and in still an appreciation for the family's eating culture and cultural/religious celebrations. Modeling healthy food choices, getting kids involved, controlling nutritional access fosters healthy eating as a family.



When we were little and were developing a palate and eating habits, the messages conveyed to us by our parents are important in the development of positive eating habits. Those really early messages from parents/elders are very important. The lovely social conversations at the dining table, attentive listening to each other, and serving food with attentiveness create a conducive eating space and flowing conversations.

Not allowing gadgets on the table and setting a proper time to sit at the dining table goes a long way in tuning our bodies to the food we eat and the digestive system to function at its very best. Mindful eating in a family means making a good mixture of some basic ingredients: eating as a family, pausing, slowing down, having fun, experimenting, being curious, exploring new tastes, and bringing the flavors of kindness and love to your meals.

In today's fast-moving world, while it can be difficult to coordinate schedules, deciding which meal of the day works best for the family and making it a priority to have atleast one meal together goes a long way in creating a harmonious and well-knit family.

5. GRATITUDE

Taking that one-minute pause as we sit at the dining table, and feel comfortable on our chairs, changes the body rhythm.



As we acknowledge the pace and the family members that sit around us, that pause changes the body and brain energy and activity. In earlier days, this mindfulness and readiness to pay loving attention to the food we are served and that pause of gratitude was provided with a prayer.

This is what we still continue as a practice in the classrooms so that attention is brought back to the self, the body, the food and people who sit with us on the table. A simple practice that can go along with a pause or a prayer is a smile. Smiling and being present helps calming down and eating food in a non-stressful, non-hurried state of mind. Those 20 minutes devoted to food in complete gratitude for the food on the plate does wonders in creating a calming and happy atmosphere.

One blessing we all enjoy, but take for granted is food. Food is essential for survival. And yet, we live in a world of abundance. Taking a pause and acknowledging this fact- this little act itself aids in calming down and aids in better digestion, enhances cardiovascular health, strengthens the immune system, and alleviates stress.

Closing Thoughts..

Food nourishes, protects, heals, and sustains life - while it connects us to the whole ecosystem of this miraculous planet. And looking deeply, scientists discover that as individuals humans are also complex ecosystems. When we eat, we eat not just for ourselves, but for the trillions of bacteria that support our health by digesting our food and providing the vital alchemy to convert the food to the complex molecules and energy we need to strengthen the human body.

While mindfulness isn't for everyone, many people find that eating this way, even for just a few meals a week, makes us more attuned to our bodies. Mindfulness eating is a form of self-care. It is a practice. It is not a method of weight control.

In fact, when we give our full attention to our sensations, feelings, and thoughts, we are caring for ourselves. We tend to eat in a less reactionary way, consuming food for satiety instead of being driven by emotion, boredom, or habit. Mindful eating invites us to listen to the feedback of the body and mind, which tell us what is truly needed in terms of nourishment. Mindful eating builds our confidence in trusting ourselves and our ability to care for our bodies. In this way, we learn to value better- our food and our bodies.

As we prepare for the upcoming summer vacations, we invite you and your family to take the opportunity to try practicing one mindful meal a day and try building a menu from the various rainbow foods. We hope you are able to take small steps in weaving the magic of togetherness at the dining table, radiating a smiling conversation and creating an attitude of sharing and gratitude so that you feel abundant, enriched and have a satisfying journey with food, ourselves and the people sharing the table with us!

HAVE AN AMAZING SUMMER BREAK AND SEE YOU ALL REFRESHED IN JULY!

