

MINDFUL EATING

So often we eat mindlessly. We stuff food into our mouths while working on the computer, watching TV, or when we're on the run. The pleasure of eating lies in slowing down and fully experiencing all the elements of food.

Take some time to explore each of the following during your next meal and notice the difference. The main thing is to have fun, learn something, and understand yourself better.



SIGHT

Look at your food and imagine you're an alien. You just arrived on Earth and have never seen this food before. Look at it carefully without naming it. Can you see the water, the rain, and the sunlight within the food?

SMELL

Bring the food up to your nose. Without naming the scent, experience smelling the food, and then describe what you smell.

PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTION

Now focus on what's going on in your mouth. Begin to notice that saliva is produced, even though you haven't yet put the food in your mouth. Notice the mind-body connection and how your senses respond right before you eat.

TOUCH

Now notice how the food feels on your tongue. Without naming the sensation, just experience the mouthfeel.

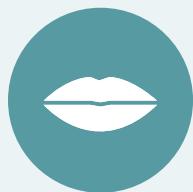
MOTION AND MOVEMENT

How is it that your hand knows how to move the food directly to your lips? As you bring the food up to your mouth, notice what happens next. The mouth receives the food. Nothing goes into the mouth without it being received. And who or what is doing the receiving? The tongue. Observe what the tongue does with it. How does it get the food between the teeth? It's amazing that the tongue is so skilled, and that such a remarkable muscle can actually receive food and then know what to do with it every time.



TASTE

After becoming aware of the food in your mouth, start biting into it very slowly. Then begin to chew. Give all your attention to your mouth and take a few bites. Then stop to experience what's happening. What's happening is invariably an explosion of taste. Express what's going on. Be really specific. What's the experience? Is it sweet or sour or juicy? There are hundreds of words to describe the experience of tasting.



TEXTURE

As you chew, the taste changes, as does the consistency. At a certain point you'll become aware of the texture of the food because the taste has mostly passed. If the texture causes aversion, you may want to swallow it, but try to keep it in your mouth.



SWALLOW

Don't swallow it yet. Stay with the impatience and the inborn impulse to swallow. Then observe what's involved in getting the food down to your stomach. When you detect the impulse to swallow, follow it down into the stomach, feel your whole body, and acknowledge that your body is receiving nurturing food.



BREATHE

Next, pause for a moment or two, and see if you can taste your breath in a similar way. Bring the same quality of attention to the breath that you gave to seeing, feeling, smelling, and tasting the food.



SILENCE

Be silent. At this point, you probably understand what meditation is. It's doing what we do all the time, except we're doing it with attention – directed, moment-to-moment, nonjudgmental attention.

