Compassionate Care Initiative
at the University of Virginia

Mindful Eating

Eating mindfully is an opportunity to slow down from the busyness of your day and explore your relationship with food. Eating more slowly and with awareness may bring:

- greater pleasure (as you more fully taste and experience the food)
- wiser choices in what you eat
- more connection to where the food comes from
- better digestion (because if you eat more slowly and are more relaxed, the parasympathetic system will be activated)
- greater satiety (and by eating less)

Tips for mindful eating*

- Approach this meal with an attitude of curiosity, like this is the first time you have ever eaten this food or like this is an experiment and you don't know what you'll find.
- Try doing the steps below with your eyes open and then with eyes closed, and notice the difference.
- Begin by holding the food in your hands and sense what it feels like, noticing the temperature, texture, shape, etc.
- Notice if it makes any sounds in your hands, with your fingers, or by shaking it.
- Smell it and be aware of the qualities of the smell (or lack of smell) and any memories associated with the scent.
- Look at it carefully. See the colors, shapes, translucency, etc. Bring it towards the light and notice if it looks different.
- Gradually bring it (ideally a small morsel of it) towards your mouth. Do not immediately put it into your mouth. Notice saliva starting in your mouth and any reactions such as wanting to eat it quickly.
- Allow it to rest on your lips for a few moments, noticing what it feels like on your lips and if there is any taste or smell.
- Then put it (the morsel) into your mouth. Just hold it and move it around in your mouth for 20 seconds or longer. Notice the taste and if it changes when it moves to different parts of your tongue. Notice the texture and moisture. Notice if it begins to dissolve in your mouth or not. Chew it (if solid) thoroughly and be aware of the process of chewing and what that feels like.
- When you are ready, swallow it. Be aware of the sensations and imagine the internal movement as it goes from the back of your throat, through the esophagus and down into your stomach.
- Continue the above steps until you are finished. Do not rush. Try to stay present to the experience. See if you can notice something new each time you go through the steps.
- Notice what may be pleasant or unpleasant about the experience, and any tendencies to judge, want, or push away.
- Be aware of where the food came from and all of the connections from nature, plants, animals, and people that made the food manifest and come to you.
- Engender a feeling of gratefulness throughout the experience: grateful in your ability to eat and grateful for the beings who have given their lives and labors so that you may eat.

*Adapted from *Leaves Falling Gently* by S. Bauer-Wu (2011)

Resources

The Center for Mindful Eating, http://www.thecenterformindfuleating.org/

Book: *Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food,* by Jan Chozen Bays, Shambhala Publications (2009)