



Honor Your Plate: An Introductory Exercise to Mindful Eating

The following food meditation is meant to help you experience a healthier, more joyous relationship with your food. We invite you to experiment, adjust, and make it your own; these ideas are just a start!

- Begin by centering yourself with 3 deep, rhythmic breaths. Breathe all the way into your belly and slowly exhale.
- Look at your food, really look at it, before you touch it or begin to eat it. Just appreciate its beauty. Observe its color and shape.
- Take a moment to acknowledge the food that you are about to put in your body, mentally (or verbally) thank the many forms of life that came together to provide you with this nourishment. You can also thank whoever prepared and/or bought the food, even if it's you. Thank yourself!
- Next, smell your food, lean your head over your plate and smell it!
- Now pick it up (try using your hands!) and feel its texture.
- Then take it to your lips, close your eyes and take a bite.
- Notice the sound your mouth makes as you chew. How does the taste feel in on your tongue, is it sweet or sour, is the texture soft or crunchy?
- Notice how continued chewing can change the flavor, pay attention to other sensations that arise in your body at this time. Do you feel tension, impatience, anxiety, contentment, or calmness?
- When you swallow, feel the food moving down your esophagus into your stomach. Take a moment to visualize the food being digested and assimilated, all its wonderful nutrients going to support the cells, tissues and organs of your body.
- If you are with others, before the next bite, take a piece of food on your plate and turn to that person and tell them something about it, tell them what it reminds you of, why you like it, or if you've had it recently. Share the experience with them as you look at it, touch it and taste it.
- If you are in a playful mood, take a piece of food from your plate and before eating it, play with it. Imagine it's a train, plane, or bug. What does it look like? Does it make sounds? Let your food come alive in your imagination.

- After you finish eating, sit for a moment, don't jump up and move on to the next task...give yourself a few minutes to savor the food. Try taking 3 to 5 slow, deep breaths. Let the satisfaction sink in.
- Reflect on how mindful eating made you feel, what thoughts or feelings were raised for you, did you connect with your food differently, what would you like to keep or change about the experience?
- Keep experimenting! Start small: choose one or two meals a week and begin to incorporate the mindful eating principles you like best.
- If you want to experiment with music as part of your mindful eating experience, play a song that makes you feel calm and centered and doesn't create strong emotions (ex: avoid a song that evokes tender memories).

Benefits: When you eat mindfully you will:

1. Eat in moderation, because you will realize when you are truly full!
2. Improve your digestion because your body will be better able to process the food you are putting into it with your focused attention.
3. Create more trust with yourself. Through trusting your relationship to food you will know how to make choices that feel good!

Helpful Hints: We live in a busy world and there may be times when it might be difficult to fully use the above mindful eating guidelines. So, are some hints to keep in mind:

1. If you are on your commute and you're hungry and you need to eat in a hurry, try this: turn off your radio, take a deep breath and as you begin to eat, listen to yourself chew, hear the food in your mouth and connect with it that way.
2. What if you are eating in a restaurant or someone else's house and there is something very distracting or even upsetting happening around you? Pause...for just a moment, and create space inside yourself to accept what is happening around you and acknowledge it before returning to your food.
3. What if you want/need to read an article or watch a program while eating? Begin by taking a moment with your food, just one breath, to honor your plate before you dive into the work/article before you. Also, touch your food more so that even if you are not able to completely give your visual or auditory attention to your food, at least through touch you can give yourself the experience of connection.

