

Mindful Mealtime

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Has sitting down to the dinner table become more of a chore rather than a time of nourishment and interaction? Have you noticed that you sit down to dinner and have quickly eaten through a majority of your plate in a matter of moments? If you have answered yes to one or both of the questions above, it might be time for you to hit the reset button and practice mindfulness at mealtime.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice being present in the moment by engaging all of your senses and removing unwanted or un-necessary distractions. Many have found that practicing mindfulness has helped focus and productivity in the work setting, but researchers are also finding that there can be beneficial impacts to practicing mindfulness at the dinner table. You won't be chanting mantras between passing the potatoes, but here are a few tips to create a more mindful mealtime for you and your family.



1. **Mindful Eating Exercise:** An easy way to practice mindfulness is to eat a grape (or any small piece of fruit or food that you have on hand), just as you normally would. Now eat another grape, but this time slow it down and close your eyes. Pay attention to the aroma and how the juice bursts into your mouth when you bite into the grape. Each time you chew, take time to notice the flavor, the texture, the feel of the grape. With another chew, ask yourself how the grape now tastes and feels in your mouth. Take note of your satiety as well. Are you satisfied after a single grape or could you use another? This is practicing mindfulness while eating. Hopefully, you will begin to truly savor food so that mealtime becomes an enjoyable experience for your senses.
2. **Remove All Distractions:** One of the reasons mealtime has become more of a chore is because it is hard to focus on the practice of eating with the many distractions that cloud that dining experience. With lot of distractions, it is hard to listen to our bodies hunger signals to know if you are full or hungry. To practice a mindful mealtime, it is necessary to remove all distractions. This includes turning off the television, turning off the radio, and removing cell phones from the dinner table. Without these distractions, you and your family can begin to focus their attention on the task at hand – dining.
3. **Slow Down:** In our fast-paced world, it is easy to speed through meals in order to make it to the next activity or to be able to watch our favorite show. As we speed through mealtime, we do not have time to enjoy the food or to listen to our body's natural satiety signals. Slow down so that you may begin to take notice of when you are satisfied or full. This simple practice can help you be better in tune with your body's signals and help you avoid over eating.
4. **Talk about the Food:** Not only is mealtime a time to taste but it is also a time to converse. For many busy families, dinner is the only quality time they get together during the day so it is important not to waste it. To practice mindfulness while developing communication, talk about the dinner. What flavors do you taste? What textures are you experiencing? Not only will you be able to engage with the eating process but also hopefully this will only develop into more meaningful conversation at the table.

In a time when we are rushing from place to place, sitting down for a meal can be challenging, but with these four simple steps above you have more mindful meals at home.

Sources:

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3. *Mindful Eating: The Art of Presence While You Eat*, Penn State Extension: <https://extension.psu.edu/mindful-eating-the-art-of-presence-while-you-eat>
4. *The Last Orange on Earth*, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension