



No Weight Gain Contest

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, EAT MINDFUL, NOT MINDLESS

It's the holidays and for most of us, that means eating – lots of eating – followed by weight gain and a New Year's resolution to lose weight.

But why not take a healthier approach to what we eat during this holiday season and beyond?

It can be hard to eat healthy because you don't want to stop eating your favorite foods. The good news is you don't have to. You can still enjoy your favorite **occasional** indulgences, but in moderation. It's all about being mindful of what you eat.



MINDLESS EATING

Mindless eating is consuming food just because it's there. It's eating while distracted – watching TV, working at a computer or texting on our smartphones. It's eating for emotional comfort instead of for hunger. The key to mindful eating is awareness. Just by paying more attention to what you eat, you're more likely to make beneficial changes. When you pay attention to what you're eating, you can make small changes that make a big difference. Here are some tips toward a more mindful approach:

- **Be Aware of Unconscious Eating.** If you are cooking, take notice of how often you taste test. One bite of raw cookie dough will give you approximately 50 extra calories. Do you lick the spoon? If so, you are adding another 50 to 60 calories.
- **Control portions.** Especially during the holidays, know that you'll have more opportunities to eat festive snacks and desserts. You don't have to deprive yourself, just eat smaller portions and less often.
- **Eat when you're hungry.** Just because the clock says noon doesn't mean you have to eat. If you're not hungry, wait until you are – just don't wait until you're famished because you might overeat. Also, don't eat just because the food is available.
- **Plan.** Prepare healthy snacks throughout the day. If you tend to get hungry between meals, bring along a 200-calorie, whole grain, high-fiber snack. Fiber keeps you feeling full longer.
- **Slow down.** Enjoy each bite and put your fork down while chewing, then take a drink between each bite. This gives your body enough time to trigger your brain that you are satisfied (not necessarily full).





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- **Pay attention.** Do not eat in front of the TV or computer, or while standing in the kitchen or talking on the phone. When you do these things, you're more likely to lose track of how much you've eaten.
- **Look Behind the Craving.** Whenever you have a longing for a certain food—such as chocolate—sit with your craving for a minute. Note the emotions and feelings you are having. Watch the craving rise and then leave.
- **Avoid the "Good Food/Bad Food" Label.** There is no such thing as "good" or "bad" food. Food is neutral. Foods have either positive or negative effects on our health. When we label a food as "bad" we immediately start to fear it, think about it, crave it, and in many cases, label ourselves as "bad" for eating it.
- **Choose Acceptance.** If you do overeat, don't punish yourself by starving the next day. Accept it and move on.
- **Be Flexible.** Each day is different. Allow yourself to eat what nourishes you, rather than sticking to a rigid routine.
- **Be Thankful.** Before each meal take a moment to breathe. Think about where your food came from, the elements of the earth that created it and the nourishment it offers.
- **Use technology.** As we continue to become increasingly distracted by modern technology, our focus on health can fall to the back burner. But it doesn't have to be that way. There are now apps that manage food records, count calories, help you track what you eat and even provide guidance on healthy food choices at the grocery store and restaurants.
- **Keep a food diary.** Write down everything you eat, look at it, then identify why you ate it – was it hunger, stress, boredom? Then look for areas you can make adjustments and incorporate healthy changes.





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A MINDFUL EATING EXERCISE



The following exercise is simple and will only take a few minutes.

Find a small piece of food, such as a piece of chocolate or a small cookie. You can use any food that you like. Eating with mindfulness is not about deprivation or rules.

Begin by exploring this little piece of food, using as many of your senses as possible.

- 1) Before you pick up the chocolate take a couple of deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth, just to allow the body and mind to settle a little. Mentally leave behind whatever you're doing for a moment or two.
- 2) Take a moment to appreciate the chocolate. Where has it come from? What's in it? Try and imagine the different ingredients in their natural growing environment and even the types of people who might have grown the cocoa beans.
- 3) Before you begin to eat it, pause to notice if there's a feeling of impatience, of just wanting to eat it as quickly as possible. Notice if there are feelings of pleasure and excitement, or feelings of guilt and unease, about the idea of eating the chocolate.
- 4) Slowly unwrap the chocolate and then take a good minute or so to explore it with your eyes, nose and hands. Look at it closely, smell it carefully and then touch it to see how it feels.
- 5) By now you'll be more than ready to taste it. Take a small bite (or alternatively put the whole thing in your mouth), but try to resist chewing the chocolate. Notice how it feels in the mouth, the temperature and the texture. Also become aware of the taste - whether it's sweet, bitter, creamy etc. Try to allow the chocolate to melt in the mouth by gently moving it around with your tongue, rather than chewing it. Sit back in your chair and enjoy the moment.

Remember, appreciate it, savor it, and enjoy it.