



Eat With Me, Train With Me

Week 8

Mindful Eating

Eating mindfully is one of the most powerful strategies for sustainable healthy eating and weight management. It's all about getting back to basics, listening to your body and eating in accordance with your natural cues for hunger and satiety.

Much of our problem with unwanted weight gain can be attributed to “mindless eating”, which is also known as “non-hungry eating”.

Non-hungry eating makes perfect sense from an evolutionary perspective. When food was scarce, survival depended on eating whenever food was available. Fortunately, food is now always available. Unfortunately, this has resulted in many of us eating more than our body needs, which in turn increases our risk of many diseases.

That’s where hunger comes to play. Do you know what ‘hungry’ actually feels like?

Have a think about it and jot down your thoughts below:

Chances are that if you eat because it’s “lunch time”, or if you “can’t leave the table without finishing what’s on your plate”, or “eat all of your dinner before you can have desert”, or “never waste food” or eat until you’re uncomfortably stuffed instead of stopping when you actually feel full, you’ve been eating on auto-pilot and may not be able to recognise when your body is telling you it’s hungry or satisfied. This is because you haven’t been relying on your body’s natural cues to tell you when and how much to eat.

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Re-connecting with hungry

The good news is that you can find your inner 'hungry' again. By focusing on hunger as your guide, you can become your own internal expert about when, what and how much to eat.

What hungry feels like

This is what hungry feels like:

- Stomach rumbling, growling or grinding
- Light headedness, low energy, shakiness or headache

Hunger goes away when you eat something. It is a physical symptom, not a thought or temptation.

Cravings

Cravings are simply urges or temptations to eat without the presence of physical symptoms of hunger. Also known as 'head hunger', they can be triggered by:

- social occasions, eg you may have certain cravings when dining out
- your surroundings eg driving past a McDonalds may trigger a craving
- your mood or emotions, eg eating when stressed, bored or upset
- thirst
- recent consumption of 'moreish' foods or strongly flavoured foods or drinks, which trigger the appetite centres in the brain.

The million dollar question: Am I hungry?

To get out of the habit of eating mindlessly, start asking yourself, "Am I hungry?" every time you feel like eating. This simple but powerful question will help you recognise the difference between an urge to eat caused by the physical need for food from an urge to eat caused by head hunger.

If you are truly hungry, then you should eat to satisfy that hunger. If it's just a craving, have some water, a cup of tea or just acknowledge it as a craving and do something to distract yourself from eating. If you can pinpoint the cause of your craving it is best to deal directly with the cause. Eating is great at satisfying physical hunger. That's exactly what it's meant to do. Eating does a really poor job of satisfying other needs. So eating to satisfy a craving caused by, for example, boredom, will not cure the boredom and can lead to feelings of guilt.

Hunger is your instinctive guide to weight management

Reconnecting with your hunger signals can help you lose weight, but only if you are overweight. Here's how. If you eat when you're hungry and stop when you're satisfied:

- You'll eat less food when you're eating to satisfy physical hunger than if you eat to satisfy other needs. Think about it. If you aren't hungry when you start eating, how do you know when to stop....?

- You're more likely to choose foods that are healthier and inherently lower in calories. If you aren't hungry but you're eating because you are sad, happy (eg celebrating), upset or angry, what kinds of foods do you usually want? Most likely comfort foods such as chocolate, pizza, cookies, chips and other calorie laden snacks that have zero nutrition.
- "Food actually tastes better when you're physically hungry. Hunger really is the best seasoning—so you eat less but enjoy it more."¹

Putting it all into practice

Before you can start to eat mindfully, you need to ask yourself the following questions to help you recognise and better understand how you make decisions about your eating. Use your answers to these questions to discover ways you can become more mindful about your decisions to eat.

1. Why do I eat and when do I feel like eating?

List all the reasons that trigger you to eat. Eg, mealtimes, social events, certain people, stress, boredom, buffets, getting ready to start a diet...

Are any of the triggers you identified not related to hunger? If so, how can you deal with the causes of those triggers? What can you do in place of eating until you're actually hungry? What situations or emotions trigger you to overeat?

2. What do I eat?

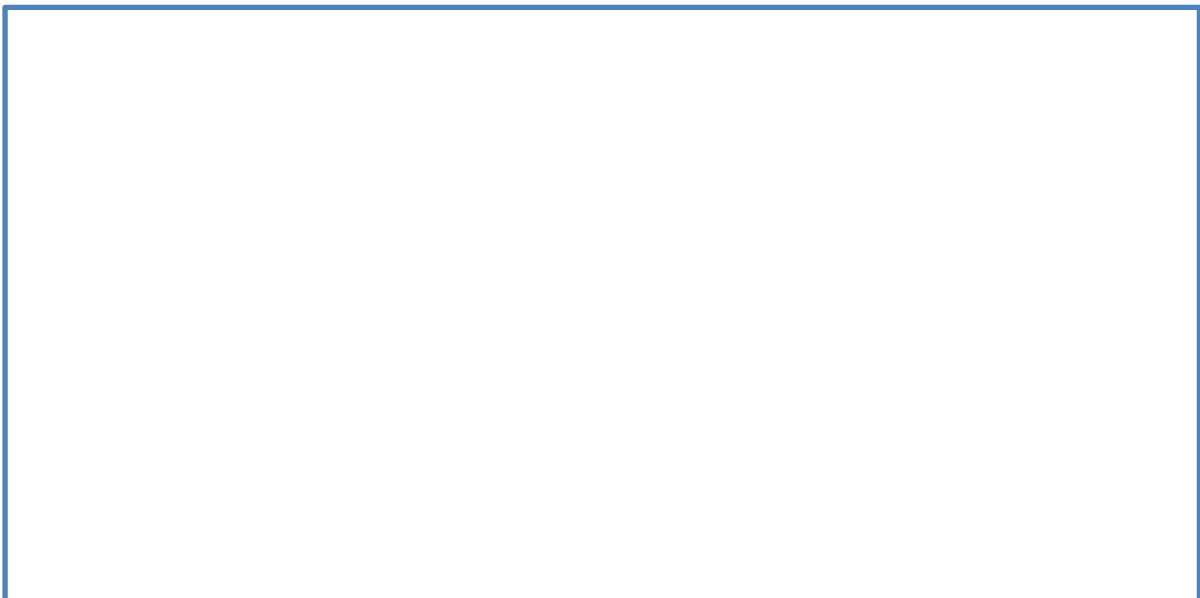
What do you eat in a typical day? Do you change your diet when you keep a food diary? Do you restrict certain foods only to give in and overeat? What changes would you like to make to your diet and why?



3. How do I eat?

Do you eat while distracted? Eg do you eat while watching TV or at the movies, or while working, reading or in the car while driving?

Do you eat quickly? Do you eat differently in private than in public?

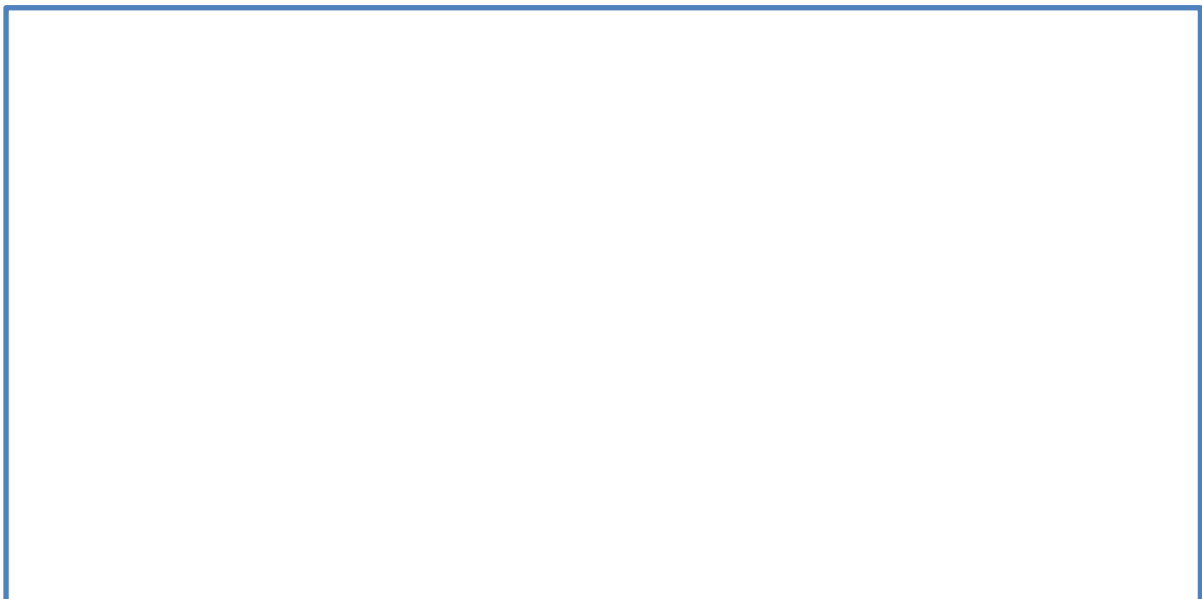


4. How much do I eat?

How do you typically feel when you've finished eating? Satisfied, still hungry, really full or overstuffed? Do you like that feeling? Do you usually finish everything on your plate?



What situations or emotions trigger you to overeat? What could you do to address those triggers more effectively? Eg: order less food; ask for a takeaway container when I can't finish my meal at a restaurant; get up from the table; place a napkin on my plate, turn off the TV etc.



Non-restrictive eating: eat whatever you like & lose weight

Eating mindfully is not about dieting or restricting what you eat. In fact, it is the complete opposite. It's about eating whatever you want to eat but only if you do it mindfully.

To eat mindfully, you must:

- Ask yourself “Am I hungry?”.
- Listen to your body – it will tell you when to eat and when to stop eating
- Eat whatever you want to eat but only when you are hungry
- When you eat:
 - Notice the appearance and presentation of the food
 - Breathe in the aroma of the food
 - Feel the various textures of the food in your mouth
 - Notice the various flavours of the food
 - Chew slowly and enjoy the textures and flavours
- Always stop eating when you feel satisfied.

Eating mindfully takes practice. It puts you in control of what, when and how much you eat instead of you following a diet plan or any restrictions on food. All foods are allowed. This may sound a bit dangerous at first, but what you'll find is that when you eat mindfully, you will be able to stop at one square of chocolate, or two beers or a glass of wine instead of bingeing or overeating mindlessly.

The first step to changing the way you eat is awareness. Together with eating whole, minimally processed foods, eating mindfully is the best easiest way to eat healthily and manage your weight effortlessly over the long term.