Mindful Eating 101

*Mindful eating* involves paying full attention to the experience of eating and drinking, both inside and outside the body. We pay attention to the colors, smells, textures, flavors, temperatures, and even the sounds of our food. We pay attention to the experience of the body. Where in the body do we feel hunger? Where do we feel satisfaction? What does half-full feel like, or three quarters full?

*Mindless eating* refers to the finding that people make nearly 20 times more daily decisions about food than they are aware of (an average of around 250 each day). As a result, they can be easily influenced by small cues around them such as family and friends, packages and plates, names and numbers, labels and lights, colors and candles, shapes and smells, distractions and distances, cupboards and containers.

**Strategies for Eating Mindfully**

- Eat when you are hungry. Watch for your body’s hunger cues as your signal that it is time to eat. Eat enough to feel satisfied and comfortably full, not stuffed. For most of us, this means eating every 3-5 hours or so. Balanced meals that include grains/starchy vegetables, protein, and vegetables and/or fruits promote satisfaction and satiety.
- Eat until you’ve had enough. If we’re used to eating until we’re uncomfortable, we may want to work on redefining our definition of how much is enough. Being comfortably full after a meal may be necessary to feel satisfied for some people. On the other hand, consistently eating until we’re stuffed is not ideal for healthy eating as it may mean we were not listening to our bodies’ signal of fullness. Occasionally overeating is normal; it’s the habit that we want to avoid.
- Always have healthy snacks available. Healthy snacks add needed nutrition to your diet and, if done right, actually keep you from overeating. Snacks can provide vitamins and minerals you aren’t getting during other meals. You also want to choose foods that are high in fiber or include lean protein to give you energy and keep you full longer. With mindful eating, you can get nutritious snack calories that complement your regular meals.
- Stop multitasking at meal times. It’s really difficult to focus on eating if you’re doing other things. Set aside time for eating without other entertainment.

**Mindfulness: Setting the Stage – 30 seconds of silence before meals**

Before you begin eating any meal or snack, become silent for 30 seconds

1. Take a close look at your food. Notice colors, shapes, and arrangements
2. Name to yourself all the foods you see
3. Detect all the odors in the food. Move your nose above each food and mindfully enjoy the aromas you sense.
4. Imagine yourself eating each food attentively and on purpose.