



Mindful Eating



Introduction

Learning to focus and what you are eating is a simple mindfulness exercise with numerous positive aspects:

- We can learn to enjoy and be grateful for any meal we have and quite possibly enjoy textures and flavours we never really noticed before.
- Mindful eating can help calm the mind as we are unable to think about past and future events when our attention is completely focused on the human sense of 'taste'.
- We can feel more 'present' and as such enjoy the company with those we are having a meal with and therefore engage well in conversations.
- Mindful eating can curb binge eating and help us to enjoy a small piece of chocolate say without feeling the need to devour the whole bar.

The Exercise

If you like them, raisins are a great way to try doing this activity. otherwise choose whatever you like. Take your chosen food item and place it in your hand. Pretend you have never seen or tasted this food item before. It is a completely new experience.

We will now explore this item with all our senses, beginning with sight. Try to look at your food item from numerous angles. Hold it up to the light, does the light bounce off it and cause shadows or can you see light coming through it? Focus on any ridges or bumps in it or notice how smooth the texture looks. Turn it around with your fingers and notice what colour it is.

Next, explore the texture. With one finger, move the item around on your hand, feeling the sensations on your finger and palm of the hand. Now pick it up and notice how it feels between your fingers. Roll it around if possible. Be warned that you may need a tissue handy if doing this with chocolate on a warm day!. Notice any feelings any softness, hardness, coarseness, or smoothness.

While you're doing this, if thoughts arise such as "Why am I doing this weird exercise?" "How will this ever help me?" or "I hate these objects," then just see if you can acknowledge these thoughts, let them be, and then bring your awareness back to the object. Remember, one of the aims of mindfulness is to be non-judgmental your attention.

Take the object beneath your nose and carefully notice the smell of it. How could you describe the smell if you were to describe it to a friend? What is it similar in smell to if anything at all?

Bring the object to one ear, squeeze it, roll it around, and hear if there is any sound coming from it.

Begin to slowly take the object to your mouth, noticing how the arm knows exactly where to go and perhaps becoming aware of your mouth watering. Gently place the object in your mouth, on your tongue, without biting it.

Simply explore the sensations of this object in your mouth. Turn it over a few times with your tongue. When you're ready, intentionally bite down on the object, maybe noticing how it automatically goes to one side of the mouth versus the other. Also notice the tastes it releases. Slowly chew this object. Be aware of the saliva in your mouth and how the object changes in consistency as you chew. When you feel ready to swallow, consciously notice the intention to swallow, then see if you can notice the sensations of swallowing the raisin, sensing it moving down to your throat and into your stomach.

Take a moment to congratulate yourself for taking this time to experience mindful eating. If you want to, use the mindful eating record to make any notes.

See if you can take a moment when eating to be mindful of different foods and notice if and how your relationship with food changes.