

Food for Thought

What is mindful eating?

- Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food preparation and consumption by respecting your own inner wisdom.
- Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body by using all your senses to explore, savor, and taste.
- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating.
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, neutral or dislikes) without judgment.



Free Handout for Individuals from The Center for Mindful Eating

Mindful Eating: Help to create curious kids

By Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE

How can mindful eating help your children eat healthier? Curiosity is the key. Curiosity helps kids become interested in every aspect of food and eating.

Filling, but not overfilling, your kid's stomach.

It is hard to imagine how much food a child needs. Have your child make a clenched fist. This represents her actual stomach size. At meals or snacks, help your child set the intention to fill her

stomach, but not overfill it. The following is a great tip from Michelle May, MD, author of *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat*.

Have your child "check in" with hunger before the meal. Ask her to rate her hunger. To better understand your child's hunger and fullness, use this scale: 1 is very hungry, 3 is hungry, 5 is satisfied, 7 is very full, and 10 is so full that she is physically sick.

Brian Wansink, PhD, author of *Mindless Eating*, offers this suggestion:

If your child is old enough, let him serve himself. Generally, when a person self-serves, he is better able to choose an amount of food that matches his hunger.

Finding comfortable fullness

Help your child remember that the intent of eating is to have a comfortable level of

fullness. This means guiding her to select the amount of food that will fill this hunger, not overfill or under-fill it. Mindful eating has an intent that at the end of the meal the person will feel physically better AFTER eating than before.

Ask and cue your children to check in with their fullness WHILE they are eating. Remind them that the key is to not overfill or under-fill their hunger.

My kids aren't hungry at meals

Sometimes a child's hunger doesn't match the family schedule. Eating expert Ellyn Satter, LCSW, RD, reminds us that hunger and fullness are always changing.

Ask your child why she thinks she is not hungry at meals. Explore the reason with her and brainstorm possible solutions. For example: Did you fill up on snacks before dinner?

Here is a tip from www.mindlesseating.org:



Change where less nutritious foods are kept. Move them to out-of-the-way areas of the kitchen. Put more nutritious choices in the open places that are easy to access.

If your kids are interested in cooking and nutrition, there are some wonderful resources, including the magazine Chop Chop. You can visit the magazine online at <http://www.chopchopmag.org/>



Making meals fun

Is dinner a fun or stressful time? Mindful eating can reduce stress and bring enjoyment back to the meal.

Mindful eating opens the door for families to experiment with what would be fun. Have you ever had a food crunch contest? Or described what a color tastes like? Ask your kids some food trivia: Where did this food come from? Maybe find the state or country where the food is grown or where the recipe is from. You can ask the table to name a nutrient that the food or meal offers. You can learn about each person's day by playing the game "2 truths and a lie" and guess which is the lie.

Food guilt: Frustration or shame?

After your child eats, is the meal fueling his life, energizing his body or is something else happening? Explore with your child the feelings that he has about food and eating. Food and eating can be a joy for many children, but other emotions such as guilt, frustration, doubt or shame can be generated.

When your child is seeking food just after eating, or eating without being physically hungry, this may be a signal that she is using food to deal with stress or other emotions. Listen to your child without judgment as she explores these feelings. Help your child remember that eating can only solve the problem of hunger. It cannot help her make friends, pass a test or end boredom.

What should my kids eat?

If you are not sure what is "healthy" food, you are not alone. Every year we are learning more about what is healthy.

If you have questions about your child's specific nutrition needs, nutrition expert and author Ellyn Satter's [website](#) is worth exploring.

If you would like to brush up on some sound nutrition for the whole family, check out [Live Well: Omaha Kids](#), then click on

Curiosity helps kids become interested in every aspect of food and eating.

5-4-3-2-1-GO! for more information and ideas.

For more information, please visit these resources:

- Live Well: Omaha Kids website: <http://livewellomahakids.org/>
- Mindless Eating, Brian Wansink, PhD: <http://www.mindlesseating.org/>
- Am I Hungry? Michelle May, MD: <http://amihungry.com/>
- Ellyn Satter: <http://www.ellynsatter.com/how-to-feed-i-24.html>
- Chop Chop: The Fun Cooking Magazine for Families <http://www.chopchopmag.org/>

Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE, is a registered dietitian, certified diabetes educator, and a cofounder of TCME.org. She is the co-author of two books: Discover Mindful Eating: A resource of handouts for health professionals and Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat with Diabetes. To learn more about Megrette, please visit her at megrette.com

