

Food *for* Thought

A quarterly newsletter from The Center for Mindful Eating

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Welcome to

The Center

for Mindful Eating

TCME is a member-supported forum for professionals interested in understanding the value of mindful eating. TCME identifies and provides resources for individuals who wish to help their clients develop healthier relationships with food and eating, and bring eating into balance with other important aspects of life. Mindfulness practices have been shown to have a positive impact on many disease states and health concerns, and mindfulness approaches are increasingly being applied to eating and food choice. The benefits of mindful eating are not restricted to physical health improvement alone. Practitioners may find that mindfulness and mindful eating can affect one's entire life. The Center for Mindful Eating does not promote a singular approach to mindful eating but is committed to fostering dialogue and the sharing of ideas, clinical experience, and research.

About This Issue

The theme for this issue of *Food for Thought* is **the creating of a mindfulness practice**. The idea of practice may evoke memories of repetition at the piano. Repetition is one way of learning a new skill but rote repetition may foster *mindlessness*. The question becomes how can professionals setup effective mindful eating practices? In this issue we are pleased to share with you ideas from Mark Blackwood, MD who discusses how a mindful eating practice might be introduced to patients. Ronna Kabatzinck PhD, provides instructions for setting up a mindful eating practice and Jean Kristeller PhD, offers a review a brief research review mindful eating programs.

The board of TCME hopes you benefit from this issue of *Food for Thought*. We express our gratitude to the many individuals who have become members of TCME over the past year. Their tax-deductible donations allow us to continue to provide valuable services. Visit www.tcme.org and explore our current offerings. If you are not a member, please consider joining. It's as easy as clicking "Join Now" at the bottom left of our home page.

Prescribing Mindfulness

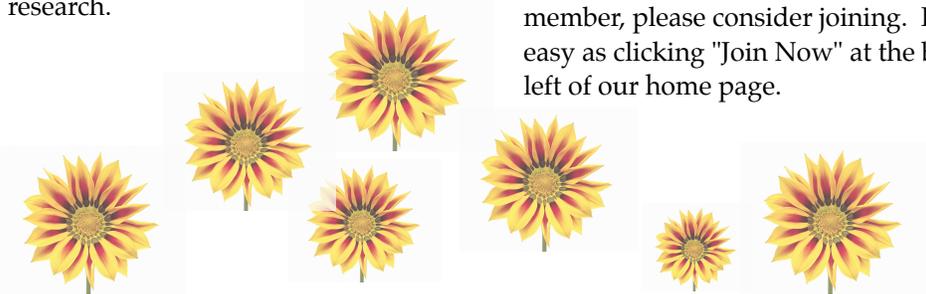
by Mark Blackwood MD

Each day in our offices, patients express feelings of being swept up by the pace of life. They report no time to exercise, no time to eat right, a sense of life moving too quickly. They often make the connection between this frenetic tempo and their health problems, but they struggle to follow through in establishing new, more adaptive behaviors. By creating and modeling a mindfulness practice, we can assist patients in slowing down and effecting lasting, beneficial change.

In contrast to prior generations, we are expected to work longer hours, take more work home, and remain more accessible and accountable to our jobs through electronic means. We hurry to get the kids to soccer practice and music lessons on time, and then have little energy to



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attend to our own personal needs. We feel pressure to take shortcuts with self-care practices. Simply pausing, sitting and reflecting, can bring us back into the moment, and thereby allow a more thoughtful and balanced approach to our days.

Modeling is an effective way of teaching mindfulness. Patients often comment on the piles of charts on my desk. I can share that I, too, can get swept up in work, forgetting to take a moment to slow down and breathe. Such disclosures provide credibility when talking about demands on our time. A brief, specific example of how we use mindfulness in our lives can be helpful. Practicing what we preach is an important backdrop to the conversations we have and allows us to be genuinely enthusiastic about the possibility for success.

As a primary care provider, I am fortunate to have long-term patient relationships and opportunities to present mindfulness in a variety of circumstances over time, weaving this common thread through discussions on health issues. But I return to the basics again and again: simply being present in the moment. Narrowing the mindfulness concept down to something tangible is important. I often ask patients to try a mealtime exercise. I suggest they stop at lunchtime, put down their work, sit quietly for a few moments, checking in with mind, body and place. The simple act of pushing the chair back from the desk, looking out the window, and taking a deep breath can be remarkably powerful. Letting the day's events go and briefly becoming still has an immediate and self-evident effect. Just think about the last time you were hard at work and received news, good or bad, that really made you stop and think. In such moments, it is not unusual to experience a profound sense of clarity.

We don't need to wait for surprises to have this insight. We can strive to have this awareness on a continuing basis. But it can be difficult for patients to regularly practice this kind of self-care. Self-defeating thoughts can derail them. Ideally, mindfulness practice exposes these thoughts and reactions. It becomes easier to recognize unhelpful patterns or habits when the mind is less cluttered, when we focus on the moment at hand and learn to see ourselves in it. It is also easy to assume that in order to establish such a practice, we must do so in a rigid, systematic, rote way to make it 'stick.' And so, out of habit, we look for ways to



make the new behavior automatic, so we can relax and not think about it!

At the heart of mindfulness are flexibility and listening to cues and experiences. This may feel overwhelming, especially early on. When instructing patients, small steps, clearly stated, are easier to implement. An example is to establish the lunchtime habit first, closing the office door (or leaving the cubicle to go outside), turning off the computer monitor, shutting off the cell phone, and second, noticing internal cues such as hunger, fatigue, anxiety, whatever feelings arise at that moment. This is more apt to be successful and self-sustaining if the patient is aware of the habitual patterns and feelings (guilt at not working through lunch, etc.) conspiring against him. Committing to a two-week trial period, for just 5 minutes a day, may give the patient an early sense of accomplishment

and what it can do for his productivity by returning to work refreshed.

Adopting more useful patterns of behavior involves understanding and valuing the benefits of the changes, practicing new behaviors in manageable short segments, experiencing the benefits associated with those changes early on, and then anticipating, recognizing and countering the forces that lead us back into old patterns. The importance of supportive encouragement should not be underestimated. Developing and using these strategies can provide a powerful intervention for our patients. Mindfulness practice holds great promise. It creates the necessary pause, allowing our own wisdom to be heard.

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How to Set Up a Daily Mindful Eating Practice

By Ronna Kabatznick, Ph.D

Eating is such a significant part of our daily lives, yet it's so easy to be disconnected from it. In one moment, our plates are full, and in another, completely empty. What happened? We hardly tasted or consciously enjoyed even one bite. We can change this mechanical way of eating by establishing a daily mindful eating practice.

Make the commitment. Set aside a few minutes each day to practice mindful eating. Start with committing to eating one meal or snack mindfully each day – or even one part of a snack or meal, and then increase every week or two, until you find you can do this with every meal or snack. If possible, try to choose a time when you can focus your attention, without a lot of distraction such as loud music or interruptions. Mindful eating includes many aspects – awareness of hunger, fullness, taste, and choice. This

practice focuses on primarily on taste experience.

Make a simple food choice. It's helpful to begin a mindful eating practice with a small amount of one type of food that is not a trigger food for overeating (a food that doesn't stimulate the desire to overeat.) For example, a simple food choice may be a carrot, one or two grapes, or slices of banana. As mindfulness grows and deepens, choose more challenging foods, such as a few chocolate chips or cookies.

Offer your full attention. Begin by picking up and holding the piece of food, such as a grape, in your hand. Allow your senses to become alive: smell the grape, notice its contours, shape, colors, the feeling of it in the palm of your hand, between your fingers. When the mind wanders to thoughts of the past or future, gently bring it back to the grape. There is no other grape like it in the universe.

Then, mindfully lift your hand and place the grape in your mouth.

Be mindful of thoughts and feelings. There may be anticipation, "it's going to be so good. I hope there's more." Or, maybe there is a feeling of disappointment, "It's only a grape, not a brownie." Let the thoughts come and let them go.

Notice as flavors come and go: As you begin to chew, notice the burst of flavor, the tartness, the sweetness, as the grape breaks down in your mouth. Notice that just as the flavor begins to fade, there may be a strong desire to want another piece, even when you're still eating this one. See if you can relax. *Stay with what you are actually experiencing, rather than going for that next hit of flavor.*

See if you can stay with the sensations as the grape reaches your tummy, and

recognize that you have taken in the food value and nutrition of one grape.

Notice craving. Once you finish this entire process, and only then, reach for the next grape, if you choose. Notice if you're tempted with the feeling of craving for more, and if you are actually still physically hungry. You may notice how mindfully eating just one grape offers so much satisfaction. Or, In the midst of eating this grape, the thought may arise, "If only I had a handful of nuts, I'd be happy." When you are gripped by craving, the opportunity for satisfaction vanishes. Mindfulness brings you back to

"Stay with what you are actually experiencing, rather than going for that next hit of flavor."

the present moment, to the direct experience of eating one bite at a time.

Taste directly. We can allow the senses to come alive by experiencing taste directly. By letting yourself stay with the taste and feel of this bite, the possibility of satisfaction opens. What does one bite offer? How many bites does it take to experience satisfaction? Let each bite reveal the answer.

The Power of Choice: There is tremendous power in bringing our body and mind together. It helps us see that we have a choice: we can actually taste and experience what we're eating, or we can eat unskillfully and miss the whole thing entirely. As you become more attuned to tasting and mindfully recognizing the value of

food, this practice can be a welcome companion each time you eat, whether you are alone or surrounded by many.

Renew your daily commitment to mindful eating practice. Begin again and again. There are many insights and eating experiences to savor, as the journey continues.

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Meditation Practice: Is It Important for Mindful Eating?

Jean Kristeller, PhD

The concept of mindful eating is appealing – becoming aware of automatic behaviors and reactions around food, slowing down, really savoring the experience of food, becoming more aware of physical hunger and fullness, making more mindful – and healthy – choices. However, it is not well established what types of mindfulness practice may be most important or helpful. How do different types of meditation practices contribute to change in eating behavior? Is practicing sitting meditation on a daily basis essential to mindful eating? These questions are important but not easy to answer.

Research on mindful eating practice is in its early stages. Results thus far suggest that a range of mindful eating exercises such as hunger and fullness meditations, mindfully eating a variety of foods, or learning how to bring mindful awareness to every eating experience, are most powerful, but may be strengthened when used in combination with sitting meditation training.



Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Therapy program (MB-EAT), on which this research is based (see Kristeller, Baer & Wolever, 2006, on the tcme.org website), includes training in both basic mindfulness meditation and eating-related practices. All participants learn breath awareness meditation in the group setting. They continue this practice at home, for 10-20 minutes a day, with the support of a CD. In addition, they are introduced to “mini-meditations” that involve taking a few moments during the day, primarily when eating, to stop, become aware of thoughts, feelings, cravings, and immediate experience. The eating meditations, also provided on CDs, include a wide range of practices, from becoming mindfully aware of eating triggers to making mindful choices during meals.

In each of the MB-EAT research studies, participants keep track of their daily practices. In our first study, a 7-session

program for women with binge eating disorder and obesity (Kristeller & Hallett, 1999), we found that the more people used eating-related practices, the more improvement in both eating regulation and depression. In our most recent study, which used a version of MB-EAT expanded to 10 sessions, we found somewhat similar patterns. By the end of the treatment program, the participants reported, on average, about two hours of general meditation per week, forty-five minutes of eating meditations, and one-half hour of mini-meditations. Again, the more these were practiced, the greater improvement in relation to binge eating and to weight loss. Doing eating-related practices was more important, however, than sitting meditation, although all of these contributed to improvement. The more practice, the more gain!

It seems, therefore, that the most important part of learning mindful eating is practicing the guided exercises.

However, developing a foundation of sitting meditation may contribute to the ease and skill in being able to do these practices. There are now a variety of resources available, many of which can be found at www.tcme.org, but individuals who are trying to become more mindful of their eating, can be encouraged to also learn and practice general sitting meditation to train non-reactive awareness and attention. Many communities now have sitting meditation groups; resources can also be found through the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction resource network (www.umassmed.edu/cfm/mbsr). Mindfulness meditation training via audiotapes/CDs can be found online by a number of practitioners, including Jon Kabat-Zinn, Jack Kornfield, and others.

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Our Mission

TCME is a nonprofit, nonreligious organization whose purpose is to incorporate mindful eating into new and existing programs. We offer a variety of resources, including **The Principles of Mindful Eating**, which is available at our Web site and is free for reproduction for educational purposes.



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\$25 Student Membership: TCME welcomes individuals who are enrolled in a degree-granting program to learn more about mindful eating. Verification of current enrollment required. See Web site or application for details.