

# Embracing the Joy of Eating for Happiness & Health

Whether you're eating in or eating out, put joy on your menu



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Busy lifestyles often make for eating experiences that do not measure up. Remember the last time you ate in front of your desk while replying to emails. Or ran from table to stove, taking care of family during a meal. Not only do these situations often lead to choices that do not deliver nutritionally, but we also shortchange the role of food in our happiness.

The truth is that happiness is a big part of health. The pleasure we get from food goes a long way toward helping us celebrate, remember, and even soothe ourselves. Emotional eating is so often maligned, but it is actually an evolution-based process that serves up a bounty of neurochemicals designed to help us feel good.

In a world where many of us have access to an abundance of food, mindful eating can help us maintain a balance between momentary pleasure and genuine nourishment of body and mind.

Consider these four steps to finding true joy in eating, by savoring both the flavor and how food makes you feel, whether at your or your friends' table, a drive-through, or a fancy restaurant.

- 1. Wait for hunger most of the time.**  
Food tastes better when we're hungry. Hunger is also the signal that it is



time to eat. Just be sure not to wait too long. Getting too hungry is a set-up for unsupportive choices and overeating, none of which feel good in the long run.

- 2. Focus.** Eating is such a natural part of our lives, we can do it on autopilot. But the easiest things usually get the least attention. We often resort to choices that do not meet our overall needs. Consider all five senses—smell, touch, sight, sound, and taste—to get the most from your eating experiences.
- 3. Think before you choose.** Toss out nutrition rules and think instead about what will taste good and make you feel good, too. We have built-in guidance systems that, if we trust them, work well to ensure that we get the foods we need. This is another part of that evolutionary system designed to keep us alive. Check in before, during, and after a meal to get the full benefit of your body's wisdom.

- 4. Eat intentionally.** What is your intention? To enjoy, of course! Just remember to include feeling good now and later in your definition of enjoyment.

Start by appreciating the food's aroma and appearance while also recognizing what it took to get your food to your plate or hand. This pause before eating fires up anticipation, which, when you finally take a bite, can offer big payback in terms of pleasure.

Then eat slowly to fully experience the food and more easily notice when you are satisfied. Instead of forcing yourself to slow down, or even count bites (heavens, no!), savoring your food automatically slows you down. It is not something we have to do but something we want to do. And that makes all the difference.

Here's to joyful eating!

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# Restaurant Meditation

- As you arrive at the dining table, allow your body to find its space on the chair. Feel the contact points, the back of your legs, the pelvic area, the lower back. Notice your feet flat on the floor and experience a sense of being rooted and grounded. What thoughts are present right now? Have you fully arrived at the table or is the mind still somewhere else? If so, take a few moments to feel the body before looking at the menu and ordering the food.
- If you are meeting someone else, greet your fellow diners, noticing if your body or mind is reacting in any way to the people who are present.
- Allow your mind to notice any critical thoughts, strong emotion, or urges that may emerge, meeting your mental chatter with kindness and, if possible, without engaging with it.
- Taking a slightly deeper breath, quickly check in with your stomach and evaluate your hunger level. If you are unsure, continue to explore it during the meal every once in a while, to notice changes. Look at the menu, perhaps considering what you can choose that will nourish your body and bring great enjoyment.
- Once the food is present, take another breath and check in again, 'Am I in my body right now or am I somewhere else, in the universe of thinking?'. If you feel



that you are no longer present, come back to the contact points of your body against the chair, the feet on the ground, and take the first bite of food when you feel ready.

- As you eat, perhaps you could alternate your attention between savoring the food and talking with your fellow diners.
- Once your stomach begins to send signals of fullness, pause for a second and consider what would be the best course of action for you right now. Would more food enhance your experience at this moment or in one hour from now?

- Enjoy the rest of your time, allowing a sense of gratitude for the food that you have eaten, for everyone and everything that made the meal possible, including your fellow diners who shared the experience with you.

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