

# Too many rules, little wisdom, and even less satisfaction



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When it comes to choosing what to eat in order to improve or maintain good health, everybody has something different to say. From a social gathering to a magazine article, we usually hear some sort of information regarding “the” best way to eat, a healthier diet, or the latest news about nutrition.

These nutrition recommendations or food rules tend to present black-and-white, absolute messages about good foods and bad foods. They also tend toward labels, like vegetarian, omnivore, organic, sugar free, and so on. And finally, they present dichotomies: dieting versus eating intuitively; the latest diet versus what we think was eaten in Paleolithic times; even eating mindfully versus mindlessly!

Not only are these messages confusing, but also they can take away the pleasure and ease that comes from what normally is an enjoyable, nurturing and daily activity, of eating to nourish our bodies and souls (except in unfortunate situations where access to food is limited).

Most of us already have too many rules that are supposed to help us live better. The trouble with food rules is that many of them are not even based on scientific facts. They promote a sense of inadequacy about ourselves, our bodies, and our behaviors. They also cause stress and promote a distorted relationship with food and eating. Worse still, we tend to transmit them generation after generation. It is no surprise that children eight years old or younger are showing



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up in the clinic with disordered eating behaviors.

The Center for Mindful Eating promotes eating mindfully, a practice that can help us become aware of our relationship with food and eating. By focusing on our principles and values, instead of rules, we discover an invitation to use our senses to savor food with curiosity rather than fear, shame, or guilt; to explore our eating habits with attention and compassion rather than judgment, and to listen to and cultivate our own inner wisdom, perhaps with the intention to take better care of ourselves.

From this perspective, there are few (if any) external food rules that are worthy of our attention. If you are the kind of person who likes to follow food rules anyway, you may want to consider the following ones:

**1)** Eat a variety of natural food and

less processed food.

**2)** Attend to your inner cues of hunger and satiety.

**3)** Eat slowly and use your senses to savor food.

**4)** Choose foods that help you take care of yourself, others, and our planet.

**5)** Avoid rules that make you feel restricted and disconnected from your body.

**6)** Be mindful of the impact of the rules you pass onto your children.

**7)** Nourish your body with wholesome food and your soul with love, happiness, and compassion.

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# Body Lovingkindness Meditation

Use this body lovingkindness meditation on a regular basis to reverse the negative messages we often send ourselves and replace them with kind wishes for yourself and others.

- Finding a comfortable sitting position for the body, allow your attention to rest on the breath in the center of the chest—the heart center. Allowing the breath to be soft and relaxed, repeat the following phrases to yourself silently.
- Begin by breathing in and offering the first phrase “May I be safe and protected from inner and outer harm” into the heart center. Gently breathing in this wish for safety to the top of the head to the tips of the fingers to the soles of the feet, “May I be safe and protected from inner and outer harm.”
- Breathing gently in and out of the heart, resting the second phrase “May I be peaceful and content” into the center of the chest. Breathing it in, filling this body with this wish to be peaceful and content. Imagine this blessing coming in through the heart, “May I be peaceful and content.”
- Breathing gently in and out of this human heart and resting the phrase “May I be as healthy and strong as I am capable of being” into the heart center. Breathing it in to the top of the head to the tips of the fingers to the bottoms of the feet. Filling this body with the wish to have a



body that is healthy and strong. “May I be healthy and strong as I am capable of being.”

- Allowing the attention to rest on the breath in the heart center and resting the phrase “May my life unfold smoothly with ease.” Sensing all of the cells of the body responding to this wish for living a life with ease. “May my life unfold smoothly with ease.”
- Sensing this body just as it is. Resting the next phrase into the heart center. “May I care for myself with joy.” Breathing in and out of the heart, we suffuse the body with joy and delight in this precious yet ordinary human life. “May I care for myself with joy.”
- May I be safe and protected from inner and outer harm. May I be peaceful

and content. May I be as healthy and strong as I am capable of being. May my life unfold smoothly with ease. May I care for myself with joy.

Repeat these phrases to yourself for as long as you’d like. When you return to the normal activities of your day, take these wishes of kindness into the world for yourself and others. If other phrases of kindness resonate truer to you, don’t hesitate to use them instead. Make the practice your own, and sprinkle your day with kindness.

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