

FOOD *for* THOUGHT

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Letting Go *of* Food Rules

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About The Center for Mindful Eating:

Our Mission:

The mission of The Center for Mindful Eating, also known as TCME, is to help people achieve a balanced, respectful, healthy, and joyful relationship with food and eating. By providing an easily accessible source of information and opportunities to interact – via the web and in other ways – we seek to train and encourage professionals, who can then foster this capacity in others.

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About this issue:

In this issue of *Food for Thought* entitled *Letting Go of Food Rules*, we invite our readers to consider flexibility and internal wisdom as hallmarks in the practice of mindful eating. In our lead article, *How Food Rules Influence Mindful Eating*, Sandra Aamodt, Ph.D. identifies the challenges and fears that arise when considering letting go of food rules, and shares that moving out of our comfort zone established by food rules can give rise to greater freedom around food and a gentler approach to our relationship with ourselves and eating. She says, “Re-learning this inner listening takes us back to the way we ate before the outer influences silenced our trust in our bodies and what they tell us.” In *The Healthy Diet Dilemma*, Lynn Rossy, Ph.D. tells a client’s story that illustrates how our culture’s obsession on weight and weight loss consumes us. “Mindful eating is not a diet plan but a way of learning kindness toward food, yourself, and your body. A healthful way to eat naturally occurs in the presence of kindness,” Lynn explains.



In our educational handout, Claudia Vega, MD, writes, “The trouble with food and eating 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.” This issue includes a led meditation called Body Lovingkindness, written by Lynn Rossy, Ph.D., that can be used to reverse the negative messages we often send ourselves by replacing them with kind wishes for yourself and others.

Thank you to our contributors and to all our readers. May this issue shed light on a controversial topic while bringing peace and greater kindly awareness into our mindful eating practices.

Shifting Tides at TCME

The Center for Mindful Eating is delighted to welcome Ana Sering, our new full-time Executive Director. Ana comes to us with extensive experience working as a Program Director and Executive Director for a Buddhist Retreat Center. She will be assisted by Kristen Beard who has been with us for several months now learning the event management system and social media marketing. We are delighted to have them both on board with TCME!

It is with great sadness and deep appreciation that we send off Michelle Racine, our fearless Operations Manager, who has been steering the TCME ship on very limited hours since 2011. Michelle has been instrumental in helping TCME



grow into the future. We will miss not only her dedication and leadership but also her cheerful and willing attitude. Words are not available to fully express our gratitude for Michelle and the spirit of love she has brought to our team. We wish her well in all her endeavors as she goes full time in developing her Acupuncture and Massage Therapy practice. May she be well and happy!



How Food Rules Influence Mindful Eating



Sandra Aamodt

PhD

Flexibility is a hallmark of mindful eating. Learning to rely on this internal wisdom, however, can be challenging for people who dislike and mistrust their bodies, such as chronic dieters. Instead they may be more comfortable following clear rules about what they should eat and when.

The idea that there is only one correct way to eat—whatever that might mean to a particular client—gets in the way of eating mindfully. To teach the practice effectively, clinicians may need to confront this misconception by educating

clients about how rigid food rules increase the risk of disordered eating and body dissatisfaction.

Food rules are learned from our parents, peers, and culture. Before rules change their relationship with food, young children naturally regulate their eating according to their appetite and nutritional needs. Infants change the amount of milk they drink based on its calorie content. Toddlers consume a predictable number of calories over weeks, despite large variations in meal size (Birch et al. 1991). In addition, three- to six-year-old children eat more fruits and vegetables if they are allowed to decide how much they want (Kröller and Warschburger 2008).

As they grow older, children learn to pay less attention to signals from their

bodies. Even when they are not hungry, many children are encouraged to show appreciation for grandma's cooking or to clean their plates. At age three and a half, children eat the same amount regardless of how much food is served, but by age five, their consumption increases steadily with portion size (Rolls et al. 2000), indicating an increased vulnerability to environmental triggers for eating.

At other times, perhaps as a result of parents' anxieties about weight, children may be refused second helpings when they are hungry, which also decreases their ability to sense the signals from their bodies. Between the ages of five and nine, girls become more likely to eat when they are not hungry. Food restriction at age five predicts eating without hunger at

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Integrating mindfulness

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ages seven and nine, whether the girls were in the normal-weight or overweight range at age five (Birch et al. 2003).

Children whose food has been restricted are also more likely to eat for emotional reasons (Kröller et al. 2013), a behavior that usually appears after age seven. Food restriction increases children's preference for forbidden food and leads them to overeat it whenever it is available (Fisher and Birch 1999). Perhaps for these reasons, girls whose food is restricted are more likely to become overweight over the next few years (Fisher and Birch 2002) than girls who are allowed to eat as much as they want.

As children become teenagers, the cultural pressure to be thin leads many of them to internalize the need for food restriction. Yet diets do not result in lasting weight loss for the overwhelming majority of people. Instead, as in children, food restriction in adolescents and adults leads them to lose touch with their body sensations, follow strict rules for a while, and then rebel against those rules.

The resulting cycle of starvation and binge-eating is a significant risk factor for eating disorders and weight gain. Learning that food restriction is not likely to have the results that they desire may help clients to let go of the fantasy that diets will produce lasting weight loss.

One possible solution to this problem involves helping clients to move from an ornamental to an instrumental view of their bodies. Learning to appreciate bodies for what they can do, rather than what they look like, reduces the pressure to change them. This shift opens space for a mindful exploration of hunger and body image as they are, rather than as clients may wish them to be.

Most importantly, teaching clients to listen to their own internal signals about what, when, why, and how to eat will provide an alternative to learned food rules. Re-learning this inner listening takes



us back to the way we ate before the outer influences silenced our trust in our bodies and what they tell us. Our bodies are wise, and we can reconnect them through the practice of mindful eating.

When we learn to love and trust our bodies, we become partners in discovering the healthful behaviors that led to ease with food and delight in the pleasures of eating. Food rules often take the joy from this most pleasurable activity. Letting go of rules can be scary, but it can also lead us to a new freedom with food and a gentler relationship with our bodies.

Sandra Aamodt, Ph.D., is a former TCME board member and author of Why Diets Make Us Fat: The Unintended Consequences of Our Obsession with Weight Loss. For more, see www.sandraaamodt.com.

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The Healthy Diet Dilemma - Mindfulness



Lynn Rossy

PhD

“I’ve been struggling with finding a balance between mindfully eating and dieting lately,” Jennifer wrote. Like many others, Jennifer had been on the diet roller-coaster. One of the last diets was the ketogenic diet. She found it “extreme” but she lost weight, which appealed to her. A big problem was she could not “eat like a NORMAL person” and found social events very stressful. When she “fell off the wagon” and started eating a range of foods previously restricted, she gained weight. Next she tried becoming a vegan (because a friend was one) and convinced herself that eating a plant-based diet was the healthiest and best diet plan. Reintroducing grains, beans, and healthy sugars back into her diet helped her to feel healthy but resulted in some weight gain. She reported being at the end of her rope.

That was when Jennifer took my mindful eating program. She reported delight at the ability to really taste food again, allow herself to eat what she wanted, and lighten up about food restriction. However, after a few months away from the class, her old habits and patterns of thought and behavior started to creep in again.

During a brief phone conversation, we discussed all of the issues that she was facing. She was a few pounds (7-8 pounds) above where she wanted to be, and the enticement of the ketogenic diet was hard to resist. She is pre-diabetic and has a family history of diabetes. She also has a history of an eating disorder due to restrictive eating. When I asked her how she felt about her body being a few pounds heavier, she indicated that she didn’t like it. I asked her if she could love



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herself just as she is. The light bulb went off in her head. Bingo! “I think this is what I need to work on...loving myself.”

When I followed up with Jennifer a couple of months later, I discovered that she had gone back on the ketogenic diet because she believed it would address her pre-diabetes and help her not feel hungry. I shared research with her (Brouns, 2018) in a non-judgmental way. Open to the findings, she indicated that she would move into a “middle way” with her diet, one that did not have as many negative health consequences.

This story does not have a fairy tale ending, but these issues take place in the lives of countless individuals. In our culture, designed to make us feel bad about ourselves, the fixation with weight, weight loss, and the question of “what is a healthy diet?” has consumed us. Even in the face of scientific evidence to the contrary, fast weight loss and extreme manipulations of hunger signals are seen as desirable.

Conversation about using mindful eating and living as an antidote to food rules and diets is like a slow IV drip as opposed to an injection. Mindful eating is not a diet plan but a way of learning kindness toward food, yourself, and your

body. A healthful way to eat naturally occurs in the presence of kindness.

When working with clients, try to follow these guidelines in session:

1. Acknowledge the desire for rules and guidelines, as well as weight loss
2. Practice mindful eating and introduce the associated philosophy of no rules except your internal guidance
3. Practice formal mindfulness exercises to cultivate self-love and kindness
4. Time the introduction of research about the negative impact of diets so the client is open to deliberating the evidence. This process can help produce positive steps toward self-love and well-being.

Lynn Rossy, Ph.D. is the President of TCME and author of The Mindfulness-Based Eating Solution. Lynn can be reached at MindfulRossy@gmail.com.

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New and Improved Spanish Resources

The Center for Mindful Eating (TCME) is committed to supporting mindful eating practitioners all over the world through networking, webinars, publications and practice opportunities. We have slowly been focusing on developing more resources for our Spanish speaking community members. Thank you for your patience and feedback over the past several years - your messages, memberships and attendance at our events have been both inspiring and motivating to help our team members move this project forward.

Next time you visit our website, navigate to our TCME Resources page and select Recursos en Español (<https://www.thecenterformindfuleating.org/RecursosEspanol>). Here you will find a short introduction to Mindful Eating and our Principles of Mindful Eating followed by these subsections, all in Spanish:



TCME Position Statements

Our position statements are an expression of the mission, vision, and values of The Center for Mindful Eating. Reading them will provide opportunity for meaningful reflection and conversation along the path to a healthy and joyful relationship with food and eating to the benefit of all beings. Our position statements are written based on the following themes: Weight Concerns, Meditation, Healthy Eating, Food Security and Sustainable Food Systems.

Good-Practice Guidelines

Many people ask us about how to become certified as a Mindful Eating Professional. We do not provide certification, but rather offer networking opportunities and guidance for each person to pursue their own path of practice and training. Our Good Practice Guidelines articulate our

recommendations to anyone wishing to teach mindful eating to their clients, as well as for those wishing to become a teacher trainer.

Webinars & Teleconferences

We aim to provide several webinars in Spanish each year. On this page of the website you will have free access to the audiovisual content developed so far. If there are any specific topics you are interested in, please let us know by emailing info_espanol@tcme.org.

Online Blog and Publications

TCME produces a quarterly Food for Thought e-magazine with articles related to professional practice that include an educational handout and a reflection suitable for clients. Our volunteers have translated many of these issues on topics including mental health, spiritual practice,

self-compassion, weight controversies, anxiety, and more, with more to come!

Community Meditations

On the first Tuesday of every month we are offering a led meditation in Spanish, free and open to everyone. This space was created to nourish our commitment to meditation practice as the basis for mindful eating and to create a an opportunity to come together in community with other mindful eating practitioners. We are recording each session and offer them freely on our website under the Spanish Resources section.

We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to our contributors and translators Cuca Azinovic, Claudia Vega and Lilia Graue. Thank you for making our resources available in Spanish!

Too many rules, little wisdom, and even less satisfaction



Claudia Vega

MD

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



The trouble with food and eating 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.

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.

Claudia Vega, MD, MS, TCME Board member. Pediatrician, psychotherapist, and nutritionist specializing in mindfulness and mindful eating for children and families. Claudia can be reached at claudiavega@nutrintegra.com

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.

Lynn Rossy, Ph.D. is the President of TCME and author of The Mindfulness-Based Eating Solution. Lynn can be reached at MindfulRossy@gmail.com



Be the first to know about our teleconferences, mindful eating trainings, and other events!

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