

Eating with Awareness

After weight loss surgery, and often at the start of a new diet, our excitement and motivation are high and our ability to choose the “right” foods and limit the portions come fairly easily. When a broader range of foods are reintroduced, we experience many competing thoughts about what we should and should not eat. As soon as we allow ourselves to eat the foods we like, that may have been forbidden during the many years of yo-yo dieting, it seems we lose the portion control mechanism that worked so well initially. With that first bite of a treat, we are off and running and eating way too much. We know that the goal is to be able to eat a portion of any food we like without overeating or bingeing. How do we accomplish this challenging task?



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The solution is to learn to eat with awareness. What are we trying to be aware of? One aspect of eating with awareness is choosing foods that have the potential to satisfy us in the moment. For example, sometimes we are in the mood for a creamy food that is sweet and cold. Foods have a variety of tastes and textures that create different sensations in our mouths and stomachs. In determining what foods will be satisfying, and it is helpful to consider the different properties that foods have. We can learn to identify and categorize these properties and determine what kind of satisfaction we are looking for at a particular time.

What are some properties of different foods?

There are salty foods, for example anchovies, sardines and lox. There are sweet foods, such as jello, maple syrup and sweet potatoes. There are bitter foods, for example, quinine water. There are sour foods, such as lemons and sour milk. There are spicy foods, for example jalapeno peppers. There are bland foods such as rice and unsalted crackers.

There are creamy foods, for example, pudding, yogurt and ice cream. There are crunchy foods, such as carrots, pretzels and apples. There are bulky foods, for example, whole grains and bread.

Imagining the tastes and textures may help us in picturing the food that will be satisfying to eat right now. Pinpointing what will truly hit the spot is instrumental for being able to stop eating before you have overeaten.

How do we learn the skill of eating with awareness?

If we can learn to pay attention as we eat the food we crave, we can increase the pleasure and satisfaction and decrease the quantity.

Try this food awareness exercise to learn how to prevent overeating.

This eating awareness process can be applied to eating any food, but for the purpose of learning we suggest chocolate. However, a small piece of a food you really enjoy will work if you cannot eat chocolate or do not enjoy it.

Take out a small bite-sized piece of your favorite food; the size of a Hershey's Kiss is a good amount. Examine it, checking out the color, texture, shape. Outline it with your eyes. Pick it up and look at it from all

sides and angles. What sensations, thoughts, and feelings come up as you examine this food? Think about the time in your life when this first became such a pleasurable food. What do you like about it? Where do you gain satisfaction when eating it, in your mouth or stomach? When do you usually eat this food? What do you usually say to yourself when you eat this food? Put it up to your nose and smell it. What is the aroma of this food? Is it an enjoyable smell? Lick it several times and then put a piece of it in your mouth. Let it rest on your tongue with your mouth closed. As the food sits and perhaps begins to melt in your mouth, suck out the flavor and let it slide down your throat. Now check your mouth for an aftertaste. Explore your mouth with your tongue for any lingering sensations.

Close your eyes and reflect on how satisfying just one, slow bite can be.

Take another bite and focus the same careful attention on the food you have chosen, creating your own guide to maximizing and savoring the pleasure available to you from eating this food with awareness. It doesn't take very much food to experience a high level of satisfaction and enjoyment.

Whenever we have the desire for a food coming from an inner craving and we allow ourselves to satisfy that craving with the exact food we want, we need only a small amount of it to satisfy the craving. Eating more of the food does not enhance the enjoyment or add to the satisfaction. In fact, every bite we take that is past the point of getting the true pleasure of the taste, texture and flavor from the food diminishes the satisfaction. If we can learn to pay attention to how we find the enjoyment from eating a food we crave, we can increase the pleasure and satisfaction and decrease the quantity.

Choosing the foods we really want to eat based on the tastes and textures we desire at the moment and then eating with awareness, will enable us to derive more satisfaction on less food.



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