

## Mindless Eating - 2020 Leader Lesson

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### The Lesson:

#### Introduction:

"Don't rely on your stomach to tell you when you're full. It can lie," says Cornell University food psychologist Brian Wansink, PhD. It's not what we eat as much as how we eat. We can change our eating behaviors by changing external cues.

**At a Glance** Ever eat a whole bag of chips when you're not even hungry? If so, count yourself among the millions who are victims of **mindless eating**. The good news: You can turn mindless eating into mindlessly eating better -- and maybe even weight loss -- simply by making little changes

**Time Required:** Approximately 20 minutes

**Objectives:** Through this interactive lesson, participants will 1) learn steps they can take to prevent mindless eating 2) identify triggers for mindless eating, and 3) define "mindful eating" and apply it in practice.

**Teaching the Lesson:** Read or present the program. Then do one or more of the activities at the end of the lesson

### 13 tips to stop mindless eating

1, **Don't get rid of the evidence** – eating chicken wings? Leave the bones on your plate. People tend to rely on visual cues, to decide whether they're full or still hungry. Keep evidence of what you eat in front of you. Examples include the empty soda cans you drank at a barbecue or the plates used for previous courses at an all-you-can-eat buffet.

2. **Choose individual packages** - Packages that include pause points may help diminish this effect, as they give you time to decide whether to keep eating. For example, participants

eating potato chips from cans of Pringles in which every 7th or 14th chip was dyed red ate 43–65% fewer chips than those eating from cans with no dyed chips

**3. Use smaller plates and taller glasses** -Studies show that people tend to eat 92% of the food they serve themselves. One easy way to reduce portion sizes without noticing the change is to use smaller plates and tall, thin glasses.

**4. Decrease variety** - Research shows that having a wider variety of food options can lead you to eat up to 23% more.. The basic idea is that your senses tend to get numb after you're exposed to the same stimulus many times — for instance, the same flavors (10).Having a wide variety of flavors in the same meal can delay this natural numbing, pushing you to eat more. To make this work for you, try limiting your choices..

**5. Keep some foods out of sight** -Researchers report that the popular saying, "out of sight, out of mind" applies particularly well to mindless eating. To illustrate this point, one study gave secretaries Hershey's Kisses in covered bowls that were either clear, so they could see the candy, or solid, so they could not. Those given clear bowls opened them to get candy 71% more often, consuming an extra 77 calories per day, on average.. Seeing a food more often increases the chances you'll choose to eat the food. Make this work in your favor by hiding tempting treats, while keeping healthy and nutritious food visible.

**6. Increase the inconvenience of eating** - The more work is needed to eat a food, the less likely you are to eat it. Move the candy bowl across the room. The extra distance gives you time to think twice about where you really want i Adding extra steps will allow you to turn a mindless eating behavior into a conscious choice, reducing the chance of overindulgence t. Be wary of resealable cookie and cracker packages that make high-calorie snacking too easy. Leaving one of these packages open on a counter all but guarantees mindless eating.

**7. Eat slowly** - Slowing down your eating speed is an easy way to consume fewer calories and enjoy your meal more. Scientists believe that taking at least 20–30 minutes to finish a meal allows more time for your body to release hormones that promote feelings of fullness (15Trusted Source).The extra time also allows your brain to realize you've eaten enough before you reach for that second serving (15Trusted Source). Eating with your non-dominant hand or using chopsticks instead of a fork are two easy ways to reduce your eating speed and make this tip work for you. Chewing more often can help as well.

**8. Choose your dining companions wisely** - When dining in groups, sit next to people who eat less or at a slower pace than you. Finishing first can push you to mindlessly nibble what's left on the plate while the rest of the group finishes their meal. Other ways to counter this effect include choosing in advance how much of your meal you want to consume or asking the server to remove your plate as soon as you're done eating.

**9. Eat according to your inner clock** - Relying on external cues like the time of day to determine your level of hunger may lead you to overeat. If you have difficulty distinguishing physical from mental hunger, ask yourself whether you would readily eat an apple. Remember, real hunger doesn't discriminate between foods. Another telltale sign of mental hunger is wanting something specific, such as a BLT sandwich. A craving for a specific food is unlikely to indicate real hunger.

**10. Beware of 'health foods'** - Thanks to clever marketing, even foods labeled as healthy can push some people to mindlessly overeat. "Low-fat" labels are a prime example, as foods low in fat are not necessarily low in calories. Be aware of the tendency to unconsciously overeat foods that are considered healthier, or compensate for them by having a side of something less healthy, such as rewarding yourself for choosing Subway instead of McDonald's, by adding chips and a cookie.

**11. Don't stockpile** - Research has shown that buying in bulk and stockpiling foods can push you to eat more. Avoid falling for this effect by purchasing only what is necessary and trying not to buy snack foods for future events or unexpected visits.

**12. Maximize food volume** – Filling up with water and high fiber foods, tricks your brain into thinking you consumed more calories, helping decrease the likelihood of overeating and weight gain. Start with this simple mindful eating technique. "Pour yourself a 20-ounce glass of water, drink half, and concentrate on what it feels like in your stomach. Then drink the other half. People notice an immediate difference. The water stretches the stomach and they feel full.

**13. Unplug while you eat** - of the biggest mindless eating traps today is "eating and doing something else, such as driving or watching TV. You're eating without thinking. If you have an endless supply of food and you are paying attention to something else, it's hard to stop eating." People engage in much mindless eating during daily activities such as cooking dinner, watching a child's soccer game, checking out YouTube, or working at their desk. Eating while you're distracted can lead you to eat faster, feel less full, and mindlessly eat more. Whether this is watching TV, listening to the radio, or playing a computer game, the type of distraction doesn't seem to matter

**The Bottom Line** - Having a healthy diet means not only paying attention to what you are eating, but also how you are eating. For the best results, choose just three of these tips and aim to apply them consistently for around 66 days — the average time it takes to create a habit.

## Evaluation

Ask the following questions at the end of the lesson.

1. Name at least two things you have learned today about mindless eating.
2. Identify one or more causes of mindless eating.
3. Describe at least one step which you will take to stop mindless eating.

## Activities:

Choose one or more of the following activities to go with the lesson:

1. Ask FCE members how many of the 13 tips they can remember
2. Do the Brain Storm Activity.
3. Do the Mindful Eating Activity

## Brain Storm:

Let each member tell about a time they caught themselves engaging in “mindless eating”. Let the club members brain storm ways this could have been prevented.

## Mindful Eating Activity

Provide each FCE member with a raisin or small slice (or piece of fruit and a napkin or paper plate. Substitute the name of the food you are using (raisin, fruit, etc.) in the prompts below.

- Pick up the (food) and remove the wrapper (if necessary).
- Focus your attention on the (food) as if it is the first time you have ever seen this type of food. We will now explore this (food) using all of our senses.
- Let your eyes observe every surface of the (food). Paying attention to the shape, colors, and angles that you see.
- Now let your fingers explore the surface of the (food). Notice the textures – is the (food) soft or hard, bumpy or smooth?
- Bring the (food) to your ear. Use your hands to squeeze, shake or roll the (food). Do you hear any sounds? Focus your attention on any sounds you may hear.
- Next, hold the (food) below your nose. Notice the aroma or smell as you inhale naturally.
- Now, slowly bring the (food) to your mouth. Notice how your arms know exactly how to find your mouth. Do you feel your mouth watering in anticipation of eating the (food).
- Place the (food) gently on your tongue, but do not bite. Hold the (food) in your mouth for a few seconds. Take a few moments to pause and simply become aware of the sensations you experience from holding the (food) in your mouth.
- After a few seconds, when you are ready, take a few slow bites. Focus all of your attention on the sensations of chewing this (food). Be aware of the textures and the tastes you experience as you chew the (food).
- Notice how the tastes and textures change over time as you continue to chew.

- When you are ready, become aware of your deliberate intention to swallow the (food). Notice the sensations of swallowing the (food) as it travels down your esophagus and into your stomach.
- Finally, become aware of how your entire body feels after completing this activity.

Debrief the activity with a discussion. Ask:

How was your experience different from the way you normally eat?

Did anything surprise you about this activity?

What did you notice about this (food) in terms of sight, touch, sound, smell and taste?

Did you have any thoughts or memories come to mind while you participated in this activity?

### **Source of Information:**

“Mindless Eating” (Bantam Books, 2006), Brian Wansink, Phd. Food psychologist, Cornell University.

“Matching Mind and Body,” Kristen Johnson, Phd, RDN, Assistant Professor Nutrition, University of Tennessee 2019

Duke Integrative Medicine, Mindful Eating Exercise