

Mindful Eating:
A Course in Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food
Taught by Jan Chozen Bays, MD

2020 Update

Hello and welcome. I'm Jan Chozen Bays, and this is a short update for the video course on Mindful Eating from Shambhala Publications. When you register for this course, you'll be getting an e-version of this book: *Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food*. This is a revised edition of the original book and it's been translated into at least ten languages. Because people around the world are recognizing that they need help with their unbalanced relationship with food, and they're turning to mindful eating to rediscover their original, their innate, wisdom and ease—something that we all have. The new edition includes a chapter on mindful eating with children and with teens—which can be fun, when a family practices mindful eating together and makes discoveries together.

There's also new information on the microbiome, which, as you know, are the billions and billions of microorganisms that live on and inside of us—and now we've discovered have a very important role in keeping us healthy: not only physically healthy but also mentally healthy. So part of mindful eating is taking care of this microbiome so that it can thrive and then, in turn, it can help us thrive.

Many professionals in different countries have been trained in mindful eating. This includes doctors, nurses, dieticians, and therapists. And they tell us that they've become very tired of handing out the same old diet sheets to their patients and clients, when they know—and their patients and clients know—they're not going to follow the diet. So when they learn mindful eating, they can bring a new sense of fun and enjoyment to their professional interactions with their patients.

Isn't it nice that we don't have to rely on outside sources of authority like diets, movie stars, pills, and medications to help us relearn to listen to our own body, our own heart, and our own mind for guidance? This kind of guidance is something that's reliable, it's free, and it's always available to us. In mindful eating we ask a lot of questions, questions like “Am I hungry right now?” And if I'm hungry, “How do I know that I'm hungry? What is my body telling me that I need right now?” Something you can do when you wander through a grocery store—you can ask your body, “What would you like right now? What am I tasting now? And now? And now? What is my tongue doing? How do I know when I'm full? Am I full or not full? And what's the difference between being full and being satisfied?”

These seem like simple questions, but they are questions we seldom pose to ourselves. This Mindful Eating course will help you to ask these questions and find answers for yourself to these questions. And

we'll give you the tools to continue to ask these questions in the future and find answers, often very interesting and unusual answers, something you wouldn't expect.

In the first edition of the *Mindful Eating* book, I wrote about eight hungers. We call it “eight hungers,” but it's really eight aspects of hunger. But now there's information on a ninth aspect of hunger, which is called “touch hunger.” Touch hunger applies both to the touch sensations in our hands and also in our mouth, and especially on our tongue. In many cultures, people eat all their meals with their hands. And I've asked people from these cultures—from Africa, from the Middle East, and from India—to tell me the difference between eating with their hands and eating with utensils. And they say, “Oh, it's much more enjoyable to eat, much more delicious to eat with our hands.” And in Ayurvedic medicine, they say that you can actually begin to absorb oils and spices through your fingers when you eat with your hands, before you even put food in your mouth.

So some of those satiety signals, signals of satisfaction, can begin very early in eating, increasing your pleasure with eating. One person also said, “Why would you want to attack your food with metal weapons?”

Another area of touch hunger that is a huge field of research in the food industry is what they call “mouthfeel.” They're always adjusting mouthfeel of different foods, including wines. And we know about this. For example, if you are going to eat a potato chip or a potato crisp, you want it to have a certain hard feel in your mouth and to be crispy and crunchy. Whereas if you're eating pudding or custard, you want it to be smooth and creamy. And if a chip or a crisp or a cracker has gotten wet, and you eat it and it's creamy and smooth, then there's a sense of revulsion: “This food should not have this texture.” So we all know about touch, the aspect of touch, in mindful eating in our mouth.

There's a growing body of literature on mindful eating and how each sense interacts with all of the other senses continually. This is described as a rich multisensory experience: we could say of eating, and of actually our whole life—our whole life is a rich multisensory experience, which, if we're not paying attention, we can miss.

If you're interested in learning about more research in this area, you can look up the Crossmodal Research Lab at the University of Oxford in England. For example, they did research on whether the touch sensation that occurs when you hold a receptacle that the food and drink is in makes a difference in your enjoyment of the food and how much you would pay for that food. So in this instance, they did that with cool tea, which was put in a cup that was either made of ceramic, of glass, of paper, or plastic. And they found that people who had earlier rated themselves as having a high need for touch, in their lives, discover that it really made a difference what kind of container the tea was in. It made a difference in their enjoyment and how much they said that they would pay for it, which is kind of a standard measurement in

the food industry. Whereas people who rated themselves as not having a high need for touch found that it didn't make any difference what receptacle the food was in or the tea was in. And this has been done with different things—like people rate the food better if the plate is heavier and the utensils are heavier.

Our entire experience of life actually depends on our senses. Our brain sits in a little box called a skull, and it has no access to the outside world except through our senses. And all of the information that flows into the brain flows in, actually, as electrical impulses. So when photons are received by the cells on our retina, they send electrical impulses to the brain and the brain interprets those impulses as form or color. When molecules encounter the taste receptors or smell receptors on our tongue or in our nose, they send electrical impulses to the brain, and the brain interprets that as taste or smell, pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant. When the stretch receptors in our gut send electrical signals to our brain, our brain interprets those signals as empty, I'm full, I'm overfull. And then of course there are lots of hormones and chemicals circulating in our system when we're not eating and when we're eating, things like ghrelin and dopamine, which can give us a sense of well-being and enjoyment and satisfaction.

And then when you add to those sensory impressions all of our thoughts and emotions about the sensory impressions, then you get a whole experience, which can be pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant. When we eat food, there's a tremendous amount of input into the brain. And with mindful eating, we can begin to sort it out. We can begin to set aside our past experiences with a food, or our thoughts and emotions about a food, and actually taste the food. Some people find that something that was their comfort food, when they eat it mindfully, doesn't actually taste that good, which is a kind of surprising and disappointing discovery for them. So in mindful eating, we pop up into awareness, and out of awareness we can look at how all the senses are responding to the food, how all parts of our body, heart, and mind are responding to eating, and we can make considered decisions about what food to eat, how much of it to eat, and when to eat it.

It's important to know that in mindful eating, there are no forbidden foods. Most diets are based on forbidding certain foods, but this is not the case in mindful eating. In fact, when you forbid a food, then it suddenly acquires more allure and it's more tempting, and then you get into a fight with your impulses to eat it, but your mind says you can't eat it. In mindful eating, we say: well, there are actual foods—“real foods,” as Michael Pollan calls them—and then there are food-like substances. And, you know, evaluate the taste and your body's reception of real foods and food-like substances. And you'll find, and the microbiome will tell you, usually, that the real foods are a more pleasant experience and a more healthy experience for you. But it doesn't mean that you won't eat processed food ever.

In mindful eating, we can ask questions like “Oh, I feel like I'm hungry,” but then we stop and say, “Wait a minute, am I really hungry?” And we can check in with the nine hungers and ask, “Am I actually hungry or

am I tired? Or maybe I'm anxious about that report tomorrow. Or maybe I'm lonely." And then we can address the real problem without trying to cover it up by eating.

Another question we ask a lot in mindful eating is "How does this taste if I slow down my eating? And if I'm eating something one bite at a time, when does the taste sensation decrease?" So for example, eating a chocolate bar, you could break it into small pieces, eat one piece—full sensory experience—swallow it, put another piece in. How does the sensory experience compare to the first bite? And then watch and see—when does the sensory experience decrease noticeably? And then stop eating and refresh your palate and wait a while. So that when you have another bite, you're back to the pleasurable and intense sensations of the first bite.

Speaking of slowing down—the most potent and reliable aspect of eating mindfully is slowing down. There's now research on thousands of people in Japan, Korea, and the Netherlands—Holland—and Europe that shows that people who eat faster, and chew less well, tend to be out of balance with food and with eating and have a much greater tendency towards obesity and the complications of obesity like diabetes.

There are many ways to practice slowing down. For example, the research shows that if you just pause before you start eating—and you can have any kind of pause you want, it could be a prayer; it could be bringing to mind all the people and beings whose life energy flows towards you in this food and thanking them; it could be just taking a few mindful breaths before you dive into the food—any way you pause before you eat will help you eat more appropriate kinds of food and more appropriate amounts of food.

Another thing you can do is chew well. A number of people who've come to mindful eating workshops have discovered that they don't chew—that they pop the food in, take a couple of chews, and swallow it almost whole. And they say, "Gosh, I haven't been very kind to my stomach, 'cause now my stomach has to do all the work that my mouth should do."

Another thing that you can do is check in with your stomach. We call this "stomach hunger." So before you eat, you can ask your stomach, "How full are you? Empty, a quarter full, half full, three-quarters full, all the way full?" Then you can ask, "What kind of volume, my dear stomach, would you like me to send down to you? You want one cup, two cups, three cups?" And then halfway through the meal, or definitely before you take seconds, you ask the stomach again: "Okay, how full are you now and how much more volume would you be comfortable with?" And then at the end of the meal, you can ask those same questions to see, "Did I judge right?"

And of course we're not perfect at this. You know, sometimes, having done mindful eating for, I dunno, forty years, sometimes I'll see something that my eyes say, wow, that really looks good—like fresh blueberries picked here in our garden—and then my mouth agrees. My mouth says, yes, I want to taste lots

of that. And then I'll get too many in my bowl. So what do I do? I set it aside and eat it later when I'm actually hungry.

So checking with your stomach. Another thing you can do to slow down is use your nondominant hand to eat, which can be very amusing as the nondominant hand tries and maneuver the fork towards your mouth without impaling your lips. And you can eat with chopsticks, which slows people down. And you could even try eating with chopsticks with your nondominant hand, which can be quite hilarious.

You might have to remind yourself to slow down—if you want to try that this week by making a little sign that says “slow down” and put it on the table where you usually eat or on the desk at work where you usually have a meal. Give it a try.

In class number five, lesson number five, you're going to be practicing a potent mindful eating exercise related to slowing down called “one bite at a time” or “put down that utensil.” So for example, if you're eating and you're using a utensil—let's say this is a fork—you take one bite and then you put the fork down on the table, and then you chew that bite and really savor it. And then once you've swallowed it, and only then, can you pick up the utensil and take the next bite and put the utensil down. Or if it's a piece of bread, put the piece of bread down. And again, savor this one bite. So that's a really wonderful exercise because you can watch what impulses arise when you're eating one bite at a time.

I'm going to show you how this can be done with blueberries. And this is—this would be a really fun exercise to do with children or just people that you know—so these are blueberries. And I'm going to take a really big one—you know, so like this must be the best one, it's the biggest one I see. Smooth on my tongue except for the little bumpy part where it's attached to the plant. Okay, first bite. Mmm. Nice, kind of creamy inside, but the skin is crunchy. It's definitely sweet. Flavor's not terribly strong. Okay, chew that one. Swallow it. Now I'm going to take a small one. Here's a little bitty one that kind of looks dried up—let's see how that one is. Yep, it feels wrinkled on my tongue. Bite it. Actually it has a much more intense blueberry flavor, that's a surprise. Drier, but sweeter. I'm surprised.

So in mindful eating, you could do this for a while, you know—one blueberry at a time or one piece of chocolate at a time. And then when, you know, time is passing and it's time to get to work, you take your spoon and you purposely eat less mindfully. But you have begun your meal, or begun your coffee drinking or your tea drinking in the morning, mindfully and started your day off mindfully. When you are present as you eat, you can make many discoveries about yourself and about food and about eating. Mindful eating is an adventure and there's so much satisfaction in what Jon Kabat-Zinn calls “showing up for your life.” We don't want to miss our life.

Thank you for deciding to join us in this adventure called mindful eating, and I hope you learn many things about yourself and about food and that you're able to rediscover your innate birthright to find ease

and joy and health in eating. And that you have fun doing it.