

MINDFUL EATING

Living a balanced life includes being mindful and conscious of what you do and how you feel. Mindfulness can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary. Naturally, mindfulness extends into eating—being conscious of the eating experience as a whole, taking time to enjoy how food tastes, noticing its textures, color, and temperature, and being in touch with your appetite and hunger. When meals get rushed, or become a mindless activity, food is much less satisfying. In order to derive the most pleasure out of your meals, take a moment to focus and pay more attention to what you're about to eat.



HUNGER SCALE: ASSESS BEFORE AND AFTER MEALS/SNACKS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RAVENOUS HUNGER	MILD HUNGER			COMFORTABLE			STUFFED, OVERLY FULL		

Respect your body's internal hunger and satiety signals. These will let you know when your body needs fuel and when it has had enough. It is truly the only way to know if you are getting enough to eat, or eating too much. Think of the infant who cries when hungry and who refuses to eat any more when full. Young children know when they are hungry, and when they have had enough, as do animals. Often as adults, we stop listening to these signals and lose touch with our natural appetites. We are constantly bombarded with messages to eat—in commercials, billboards, plates of cookies at work, etc. We eat for lots of reasons other than being hungry. **Learn to tune in to your body's hunger signals.** Do you get light-headed, dizzy, grumpy? Do you get a headache, a hollow feeling in your stomach? In a stressful, busy lifestyle, it is difficult to sense mild hunger or comfortable fullness, as there are often too many other things distracting our thoughts and attention. Or it may be due to a lack of trust for these signals, such as the dieter who thinks eating when she's hungry will sabotage her weight loss efforts.

Most people only notice the extremes: ravenous hunger and stuffed fullness. It is optimal to get something to eat before you become overly hungry (start at level 3 on the Hunger Scale) and then to stop eating when you have had just enough to satisfy

Hunger Scale What does it mean?

- 1 = Ravenous
- 2 = Very, very hungry
- 3 = Time to eat, first initial hunger signal
- 4 = Feeling just slightly empty
- 5 = No longer hungry, but not yet satisfied
- 6 = Satisfied, could stop eating
- 7 = Comfortable, 80% full
- 8 = Stomach feeling distended
- 9 = Too full
- 10 = Thanksgiving Day stuffed



hunger, leaving you satisfied, but not overly full (stop at level 7 on the Hunger Scale). Ideally, you should be able to get up and walk around comfortably after a meal without feeling like it is a brick in your stomach weighing you down.

In attempts to manage weight, energy levels, and optimal nutritional intakes, here are a few things to know, and a few guidelines to follow when putting meals and snacks together:

Consider the timing and balance of your meals. Aim for a balance of nutrients including some whole grains, protein, and healthy fats. Include fruits and vegetables whenever possible. Meals digest in 3-5 hours, on average. So try to go longer than 4-5 hours between meals. By ending your meal when you feel comfortable vs. full, you may notice you become hungry sooner. So having a small snack, especially between lunch and dinner, helps.

Eat more slowly. If you take the time to savor and enjoy each meal, food will become much more satisfying. Plan on taking at least 20 minutes to complete a meal, as it takes about this much time for your brain to get the signal that you have had enough to eat. Eating faster than this will increase the chance of overeating.

Meals or snacks that are composed primarily of carbohydrate-rich foods (breads, cereals, pasta, pretzels, fruit, etc.) will digest, on average, in an hour or two. Protein-rich foods (fish, chicken, dairy, beans, soy) digest in 3-4 hours on average, and fat-rich foods (cheese, oil, nuts, butter) can take 5 hours or more to digest—it is all dependent upon the portion of food eaten and the calorie density of the meal. But mixed meals, as you can see, can help keep you feeling full for a longer period of time.



Fiber-rich foods (fruit, vegetables, WHOLE grains, beans, soybeans, bran cereals) fill you up faster, on fewer calories, and keep you feeling full for a longer period of time. As if that wasn't enough, fiber-rich foods also offer significantly greater nutritional value than foods that have been more refined and processed. So add bulk to your meals with fiber-rich foods.

Be sure to drink adequate fluids throughout the day. People will often eat more on days they are thirsty because food serves as a source of fluid (even bread is about 30% water!). Any fluid that does not contain caffeine or alcohol can count toward fluid requirements. The recommendation is 6-8 *eight-ounce* glasses daily (or 4 cups per 1000 calories consumed).

So when putting meals together, remember the following components:

- **Fiber-rich carbohydrates**—to bulk up the meal with fewer calories and contribute to a sense of fullness.
- **Protein-rich foods**—to contribute to a sense of fullness and longer-lasting satiety.
- **Healthy fats**—to contribute to longer-lasting satiety.
- **Fluid**, preferably water—to provide a sense of fullness (without the calories!)

To schedule a consultation, please call Susan Buckley, RD, Nutrition Manager, at 303.715.2285.