

Mindfulness Meditation Group

Patience Week 3

The practice of being in the present moment. A type of wisdom recognizing that at times things must unfold at their own pace; Letting go of the tendency to be impatient with ourselves and others, which causes stress.

“After all, if you really aren’t trying to get anywhere else in this moment, patience takes care of itself. It is remembering that things unfold in their own time.”

-John Kabat Zinn
*Wherever You Go,
There You Are*



Awareness of Physical Sensations

As discussed in chapter 1, the fight, flight, or freeze response has impacts throughout the mind-body system. By tuning in to the physical sensations you feel as a result of difficult situations, you can identify your own personal indicators that you're reacting rather than responding. While certain physiological reactions to stress are typical and nearly universal, such as elevated heart rate, muscular tension, and rapid, shallow breathing, we are all unique. Be on the lookout for these "usual suspects," and also study what's typical for you. Perhaps you tend to clench your jaw, or maybe your stomach feels queasy. Once you've identified how you generally respond, you can use these sensations as a signal reminds you that you may be falling into a fear-based reaction. This valuable information reminds you to connect with your breath and your pause, inviting a shift to activity of the parasympathetic nervous system. This will calm your body and allow you to enter a more mindful space.

PRACTICE: Releasing Physical Tension and Distress

This is a traditional practice for mindfulness of the body in which you mindfully breathe, scan your body, and release any tension. As you focus on each part of your body, you'll inhale healing, then exhale tension, distress, and discomfort. If you like, you can visualize healing as a golden light, positive energy, love and compassion, or anything that works for you. You may need to direct several cycles of breath to any given region before it feels relaxed and suffused with healing energy. Once that happens, move on to the next body part. As you move through your body, bring special focus to any areas causing you particular difficulty and distress, and visualize them receiving relief, healing, and vitality.

1. Lie down, make yourself comfortable, and then adopt the attitude of mindfulness. Stay with this for a few minutes, resting in your breath and calming your mind.
2. Focus upon your breath, feeling it throughout your body.
3. Focus on your feet, feeling the sensations in your feet for about twenty seconds. Breathe in comfort and healing, and breathe out tension and distress. Stay with your feet until they feel saturated with calm and relaxation.
4. Direct your attention to your calves and concentrate on the sensations you feel there for about twenty seconds. Breathe in comfort and healing, and breathe out tension and distress. Stay with your calves until they are full of relaxation and ease.
5. Direct your attention to your thighs and concentrate on the sensations you feel there for about twenty seconds. Breathe in comfort and relaxation, and breathe out tension and distress. Stay with your thighs until they feel completely calm and relaxed.
6. Move up to your torso, from your abdomen and lower back all the way up to the top of your shoulders. Concentrate on the sensations you feel throughout your torso for about twenty seconds, then breathe in comfort and healing and breathe out tension and discomfort. Stay with your torso until it feels suffused with calm and relaxation.
7. Bring your attention to your arms, extending it all the way out to your hands. Concentrate on the sensations you feel throughout your arms for about twenty seconds, then breathe in healing and breathe out tensions and discomfort. Stay with your arms and hands until they feel a deep sensation of calm and relaxation.

8. Move your attention up to your neck and head, paying particular attention to your face, especially around your mouth, jaw, and eyes. Concentrate on the sensations you feel throughout your neck and head for about twenty seconds, then breathe in comfort and healing and breathe out tension and distress. It's said that simply smiling can promote health and happiness, so suffuse your face with a sensation of well-being - a glow that's skin to a smile.
9. Expand your attention to take in sensations throughout your entire body, including any remaining tension and discomfort. Breathe in healing and ease and breathe out tension and distress. Stay with this until your entire body feels deeply relaxed and suffused with healing energy.
10. Remaining connected with your breath, take a moment to be with your body and feel a growing sense of oneness – that everything is connected. Rest and let any sensation come to you, accepting that it is part of you, no matter what it is.
11. When you're ready, open your eyes, sit up slowly, then take some time to contemplate and answer the following questions.

Reflect on and describe the change between how your body felt at the beginning of this practice and how it felt at the end.

What areas experienced the most release or relief? What was that like for you?

Where in your body did you notice particular distress? As you focused on those parts with healing attention, what did you notice about how you felt about that part of your body and its distress?

What did you notice as tension and distress were released and you began to feel reconnected to your body?

When you finished the body scan, what areas still had stress and discomfort? What thoughts, feelings, or experiences do you imagine are being stored in those areas?

One of the benefits of releasing physical tension is that it can also release feelings of solidity that have accumulated in response to fear, stress, and discomfort. As you practice bringing mindful attention to your body, you will be less likely to react to life events with physical symptoms and sensations such as tightness, rapid heart rate, stomach upsets, and headaches. Being more free of this burden, your body will be more sensitive to the flow of all aspects of your life, allowing you to be bring mindful responses to whatever you encounter. You'll also feel more at ease in your body and calmer, both physically and mentally.

That said, be patient with yourself. Don't impose any expectations that this practice will eliminate all of your physical pain and difficulties. Like all the other mindfulness practices in this book, healing through mindfulness of the body is an ongoing process. If some areas still feel suffering and distress after you practice this body scan the first time, just acknowledge this and affirm your intention to continue this healing practice. Extend the same patience, openness, and compassion to your body experiences as you would bring to any other experience life offers.

Create a Spacious Eating Experience

Here are some suggestions on how you can approach eating with more mindfulness in your day-to-day life:

1. **Bring awareness to all of the activities surrounding eating.** Spacious eating includes being aware of all of the activities that relate to your relationship and experience with food and eating. This means everything from setting the table to clearing away the dishes after mealtime, including cooking and even selecting or purchasing your food. When you assume a careful, deliberate relationship with food, you enhance the way you approach your eating experience.
2. **Create an environment in which eating is the focus.** Minimize distractions such as television, telephones, computers, and reading. These distractions prevent you from devoting your attention to the spaciousness and presence required for mindful eating.
3. **Put a minimal amount of food on your plate.** You should be able to see the plate between your portions.
4. **Assume the attitude of mindfulness.** Sit in front of the food and just look at it, noticing everything you can as if you were an artist observing it for the first time. Become aware of the colors and smells. Take a moment to reflect on where the food came from: the person who prepared your meal, the store the food came from, the truck driver who hauled it from a warehouse to the store, the farmer who grew or raised the food, the farmer's family, and ultimately the rain, the sun, and the nutrients the food absorbed as it grew. All of that energy is right there in front of you. Those aren't just peas, they express everything that went into bringing them to your plate.
5. **Pause for a moment before you begin eating.** Return to your pause for several breaths. This will help reduce any activity of the sympathetic nervous system and promote activity of the parasympathetic nervous system, allowing you to begin the eating experience with a greater sense of spacious presence and respond to the food more mindfully.
6. **Choose which bite to have first.** Look carefully at that bite, then smell it before placing it in your mouth and beginning to chew. After taking the bite, put your utensil down and fold your hands in your lap. This will help break any tendency to eat mindlessly and repetitively. Sit patiently and chew the food, observing as many qualities of flavor and texture as possible. Throughout, maintain a connection with your pause. If your mind wanders and begins reviewing the day or ruminating about what you'll be doing later, stop eating and return to your pause before you take another bite.
7. **Eat differently.** If you have the tendency to eat quickly, try eating differently. You can use your nondominant hand, eat while standing up, or eat with chopsticks. You can even try eating with your hands, as people in many other cultures do – though you may want to do this only in the privacy of your own home.

Also keep in mind that eating is an extremely sensual experience. Use all of your senses to embrace all aspects of the experience of nourishing your body.

See: Look at what you eat. Really see the colors, textures, and shapes.

Smell: Take in the aromas and, if there are several, sense how they interact.

Hear: Listen to the sounds of the food as you prepare and consume it: the sizzle of sautéing, the bubbling of the soup as it boils, the crunching of a raw carrot as you chew it.

Taste: Beyond sweet, sour, salty, and bitter, foods have a remarkable array of flavors. Open your taste buds to the subtleties, and enhance your eating experience by using more herbs and spices to add nuances and depth of flavor.

Touch: Feel the food as you prepare it, as you place it in your mouth, as you chew it, and as it travels down your esophagus and into your stomach.

Mindful Eating

Mindful eating avoids the rush of compulsive eating and encourages a slower, more fully focused, more enriching experience - a meal consumed as a series of fully focused savored moments. Being more fully present with your self and your body while eating is a powerful way to explore a healthier relationship with food. For instance, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a proponent of mindfulness, hands each of his students a single raisin and asks them to eat it as an exercise in mindfulness. I think you'd agree that most of us would simply pop the raisin in our mouth, chew a few times, and swallow, all without paying much attention, except perhaps to want more. But mindful eating - even when eating a single raisin - is much different.

Here's a similar exercise you can try, this one using a tangerine as the object of mindfulness:

Take the tangerine and hold it in your hand. Is it cool, neutral in temperature, or warm to the touch? Is it soft or firm? What does the surface feel like - leather, plastic, something else?

Look at it closely. It is uniformly orange? Uneven? Notice the variations in texture and color.

Examine the tangerine as if you've never encountered one before. Wonder about it - what is it, where it came from. Take a moment to contemplate all the elements that created this tangerine. A seed was produced by a tree, nurtured by clouds, rain, and the sun, fed by the earth. Take a moment to contemplate all the people and activities involved in bringing this tangerine to you. Who planted, weeded, cultivated, picked, packed, shipped, unpacked, sold, bought the tangerine?

Now smell the tangerine. Attend to and savor the scent.

Notice any urges to eat it - any sense of impatience, thoughts, feelings, or desires.

Holding the fruit in one hand, push into the skin with the other hand's thumb or fingers and pull open the tangerine. What does that effort feel like...and does the skin resist your touch or open easily? Does it make a sound as you peel it back? What does the fruit smell like now? Savor the scent.

Peel the tangerine. Feel the damp lining of the skin. Look at the spiral you've pulled away from the fruit inside. Squeeze the peel and smell the little spritz of citrus oil it produces.

Be aware of your conscious decision to eat this fruit. Note any thoughts or feelings. ... Do you feel any sense of excitement?

Now pull apart the little segments of tangerine and put one in your mouth. Hold the tangerine in your mouth without chewing. What does it taste like before you bite down?

Now bite into the segment. How does the flavor change? Is it sweet, tart, or both?

Chew it slowly. Notice the textures - how they change as the juice comes out and the segment empties.

Does this tangerine evoke any feelings or memories? Practice being aware of the distinctions between the sensations in the moment and all the thoughts and feelings evoked by the act of eating.

Chew and swallow, feeling the pulp go down your throat and esophagus all the way to your stomach.

Gradually eat the rest of the tangerine, noticing sensations and thoughts as you proceed. See if you can taste each bite as fully as the first. Notice any changes in taste, any changes in sensation of hunger or satisfaction of your appetite.

Once you've finished eating the tangerine, pause and reflect on the experience. Notice any thoughts of "wanting more" or any feelings of "having enough". What else can you be aware of before your transition to your next activity?

Mindful eating, like mindfulness in general, is not a panacea. As a way of being fully present to your own experience, however, it can make each meal a richer (and more enriching) experience. A deeper awareness of each moment - including the moments when you happen to be eating - will help to satisfy appetites that go beyond the physiological appetite for food.

Mindful Eating as Food for Thought

By JEFF GORDINIER FEB. 7, 2012

TRY this: place a forkful of food in your mouth. It doesn't matter what the food is, but make it something you love — let's say it's that first nibble from three hot, fragrant, perfectly cooked ravioli.

Now comes the hard part. Put the fork down. This could be a lot more challenging than you imagine, because that first bite was very good and another immediately beckons. You're hungry.

Today's experiment in eating, however, involves becoming aware of that reflexive urge to plow through your meal like Cookie Monster on a shortbread bender. Resist it. Leave the fork on the table. Chew slowly. Stop talking. Tune in to the texture of the pasta, the flavor of the cheese, the bright color of the sauce in the bowl, the aroma of the rising steam.

Continue this way throughout the course of a meal, and you'll experience the third-eye-opening pleasures and frustrations of a practice known as mindful eating.

The concept has roots in Buddhist teachings. Just as there are forms of meditation that involve sitting, breathing, standing and walking, many Buddhist teachers encourage their students to meditate with food, expanding consciousness by paying close attention to the sensation and purpose of each morsel. In one common exercise, a student is given three raisins, or a tangerine, to spend 10 or 20 minutes gazing at, musing on, holding and patiently masticating.

Lately, though, such experiments of the mouth and mind have begun to seep into a secular arena, from the Harvard School of Public Health to the California campus of Google. In the eyes of some experts, what seems like the simplest of acts — eating slowly and genuinely relishing each bite — could be the remedy for a fast-paced Paula Deen Nation in which an endless parade of new diets never seems to slow a stampede toward obesity.

Mindful eating is not a diet, or about giving up anything at all. It's about experiencing food more intensely — especially the pleasure of it. You can eat a cheeseburger mindfully, if you wish. You might enjoy it a lot more. Or you might decide, halfway through, that your body has had enough. Or that it really needs some salad.

“This is anti-diet,” said Dr. Jan Chozen Bays, a pediatrician and meditation teacher in Oregon and the author of “Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food.” “I think the fundamental problem is that we go unconscious when we eat.”

The last few years have brought a spate of books, blogs and videos about hyper-conscious eating. A Harvard nutritionist, Dr. Lilian Cheung, has devoted herself to studying its benefits, and is passionately encouraging corporations and health care providers to try it.

At the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University, Prof. Brian Wansink, the author of “Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think,” has conducted scores of experiments on the psychological factors that lead to our bottomless bingeing. A mindful lunch hour recently became part of the schedule at Google, and self-help gurus like Oprah Winfrey and Kathy Freston have become cheerleaders for the practice.

With the annual chow-downs of Thanksgiving, Christmas and Super Bowl Sunday behind us, and Lent coming, it's worth pondering whether mindful eating is something that the mainstream ought to be, well, more mindful of. Could a discipline pioneered by Buddhist monks and nuns help teach us how to get healthy, relieve stress and shed many of the neuroses that we've come to associate with food?

Dr. Cheung is convinced that it can. Last week, she met with team members at Harvard Pilgrim Health Care and asked them to spend quality time with a chocolate-covered almond.

“The rhythm of life is becoming faster and faster, so we really don’t have the same awareness and the same ability to check into ourselves,” said Dr. Cheung, who, with the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, co-wrote “Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life.” “That’s why mindful eating is becoming more important. We need to be coming back to ourselves and saying: ‘Does my body need this? Why am I eating this? Is it just because I’m so sad and stressed out?’ ”

The topic has even found its way into culinary circles that tend to be more focused on Rabelaisian excess than monastic restraint. In January, Dr. Michael Finkelstein, a holistic physician who oversees SunRaven, a holistic-living center in Bedford, N.Y., gave a talk about mindful gardening and eating at the smorgasbord-friendly headquarters of the James Beard Foundation in New York City.

“The question isn’t what are the foods to eat, in my mind,” he said in an interview. “Most people have a general sense of what the healthy foods are, but they’re not eating them. What’s on your mind when you’re eating: that’s mindful eating to me.”

A good place to try it is the Blue Cliff Monastery, in Pine Bush, N.Y., a Hudson Valley hamlet. At the serene refuge about 75 miles northwest of Manhattan, curious lay people can join Buddhist brothers and sisters for a free “day of mindfulness” twice a week.

At a gathering in January, visitors watched a videotaped lecture by Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced tik-nyot-HAHN), who founded this and other monasteries around the world; they strolled methodically around the grounds as part of a walking meditation, then filed into a dining room for lunch.

No one spoke, in keeping with a key principle of mindful eating. The point is simply to eat, as opposed to eating and talking, eating and watching TV, or eating and watching TV and gossiping on the phone while Tweeting and updating one’s Facebook status.

A long buffet table of food awaited, all of it vegan and mindfully prepared by two monks in the kitchen. There was plenty of rice, herbed chickpeas, a soup made with cubes of taro, a stew of fried tofu in tomato sauce.

In silence, people piled their plates with food, added a squirt or two of condiments (eating mindfully doesn’t mean forsaking the hot sauce) and sat down together with eyes closed during a Buddhist prayer for gratitude and moderation.

What followed was captivating and mysterious. Surrounded by a murmur of clinking forks, spoons and chopsticks, the Blue Cliff congregation, or sangha, spent the lunch hour contemplating the enjoyment of spice, crunch, saltiness, warmth, tenderness and like-minded company.

Some were thinking, too, about the origins of the food: the thousands of farmers, truck drivers and laborers whose work had brought it here.

As their jaws moved slowly, their faces took on expressions of deep focus. Every now and then came a pause within the pause: A chime would sound, and, according to the monastery’s custom, all would stop moving and chewing in order to breathe and explore an even deeper level of sensory awareness.

It looked peaceful, but inside some of those heads, a struggle was afoot.

“It’s much more challenging than we would imagine,” said Carolyn Cronin, 64, who lives near the monastery and regularly attends the mindfulness days. “People are used to eating so fast. This is a practice of stopping, and we don’t realize how much we’re not stopping.”

For many people, eating fast means eating more. Mindful eating is meant to nudge us beyond what we’re craving so that we wake up to why we’re craving it and what factors might be stoking the habit of belly-stuffing.

“As we practice this regularly, we become aware that we don’t need to eat as much,” said Phap Khoi, 43, a robed monk who has been stationed at Blue Cliff since it opened in 2007. “Whereas when people just gulp down food, they can eat a lot and not feel full.”

It’s this byproduct of mindful eating — its potential as a psychological barrier to overeating — that has generated excitement among nutritionists like Dr. Cheung.

“Thich Nhat Hanh often talks about our craving being like a crying baby who is trying to draw our attention,” she said. “When the baby cries, the mother cradles the baby to try to calm the baby right away. By acknowledging and embracing our cravings through a few breaths, we can stop our autopilot of reaching out to the pint of ice cream or the bag of chips.”

The average American doesn’t have the luxury of ruminating on the intense tang of sriracha sauce at a monastery. “Most of us are not going to be Buddhist monks,” said Dr. Finkelstein, the holistic physician. “What I’ve learned is that it has to work at home.”

To that end, he and others suggest that people start with a few baby steps. “Don’t be too hard on yourself,” Dr. Cheung said. “You’re not supposed to be able to switch on your mindfulness button and be able to do it 100 percent. It’s a practice you keep working toward.”

Dr. Bays, the pediatrician, has recommendations that can sound like a return to the simple rhythms of Mayberry, if not “Little House on the Prairie.” If it’s impossible to eat mindfully every day, consider planning one special repast a week. Click off the TV. Sit at the table with loved ones.

“How about the first five minutes we eat, we just eat in silence and really enjoy our food?” she said. “It happens step by step.”

Sometimes, even she is too busy to contemplate a chickpea. So there are days when Dr. Bays will take three mindful sips of tea, “and then, O.K., I’ve got to go do my work,” she said. “Anybody can do that. Anywhere.”

Even scarfing down a burrito in the car offers an opportunity for insight. “Mindful eating includes mindless eating,” she said. “‘I am aware that I am eating and driving.’”

Few places in America are as frantically abuzz with activity as the Google headquarters in Mountain View, Calif., but when Thich Nhat Hanh dropped by for a day of mindfulness in September, hundreds of employees showed up.

Part of the event was devoted to eating thoughtfully in silence, and the practice was so well received that an hour-long wordless vegan lunch is now a monthly observance on the Google campus.

“Interestingly enough, a lot of the participants are the engineers, which pleases us very much,” said Olivia Wu, an executive chef at the company. “I think it quiets the mind. I think there is a real sense of feeling restored so that they can go back to the crazy pace that they came from.”

It's not often, after all, that those workhorse technicians get to stop and smell the pesto. "Somebody will say, 'I ate so much less,' " Ms. Wu said. "And someone else will say, 'You know, I never noticed how spicy arugula tastes.' "

And that could be the ingredient that helps mindful eating gain traction in mainstream American culture: flavor.

"So many people now have found themselves in an adversarial relationship with food, which is very tragic," Dr. Bays said. "Eating should be a pleasurable activity."

Consider These

O.K., so you don't happen to live in a Buddhist monastery. You can still give mindful eating a spin by incorporating a few chilled-out gestures and rituals into your regular calorie intake.

WHEN YOU EAT, JUST EAT. Unplug the electronica. For now, at least, focus on the food.

CONSIDER SILENCE. Avoiding chatter for 30 minutes might be impossible in some families, especially with young children, but specialists suggest that greenhorns start with short periods of quiet.

TRY IT WEEKLY. Sometimes there's no way to avoid wolfing down onion rings in your cubicle. But if you set aside one sit-down meal a week as an experiment in mindfulness, the insights may influence everything else you do.

PLANT A GARDEN, AND COOK. Anything that reconnects you with the process of creating food will magnify your mindfulness.

CHEW PATIENTLY. It's not easy, but try to slow down, aiming for 25 to 30 chews for each mouthful.

USE FLOWERS AND CANDLES. Put them on the table before dinner. Rituals that create a serene environment help foster what one advocate calls "that moment of gratitude."

MINDFUL EATING RECORD FORM

Name: _____

What/where/when was the snack or meal?	What sensory experiences were you most aware of?	How did your body feel, in detail, during the experience?	What feelings and thoughts accompanied this event?	Did anything help or hinder your mindful eating?
Day: Hunger (0-10):				
Day: Hunger (0-10):				
Day: Hunger (0-10):				
Day: Hunger (0-10):				