

HEALTHY NUTRITION AND MINDFUL EATING

Eating and Your Health

Eating has a major effect on your health. Every time you put food into your mouth, you have an opportunity to either enhance or diminish your life. Making good food choices is perhaps the single most important way you can care for your body.

Many of the health problems in America are caused by lifestyle, especially nutrition, not genes.

People eat for many reasons. While animals eat when hungry, humans often eat to meet emotional needs, and they don't stop eating when hunger is satisfied. American culture has a focus on food, eating fast, huge variety, “portion distortion,” “clean plate club,” and family

Many people have chronic health problems that are affected by diet: obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, anxiety and depression

- Diets high in sugar, refined carbohydrates and high fructose corn syrup can lead to chronic high blood sugar or high insulin which increases the risk of developing diabetes
- Diets high in saturated fats may increase the risk of developing heart disease
- Not getting enough calcium and other nutrients can reduce bone formation and increase the risk for osteoporosis
- Processed foods, animal fats, sugar, white flour and pasta all increase inflammation in the body which can lead different chronic illnesses

Stress: Decreases digestion and absorption. Stress can lead to deficiencies.

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Healthy Eating

Eating whole foods can have a major impact on your physical and psychological health. Processed food lack many essential nutrients and are full of unwanted chemicals (take out the good and put in the bad).

Some examples of whole foods are fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, unprocessed fish, chicken & other lean meats.

Basic principles of good nutrition:

- Eat real food: food that needs to be refrigerated and that you have to prepare
- Eat a rainbow diet: lots of different colored fruits and veggies
- Drink 8-10 glasses of water daily
- Start your day with breakfast and eat regular meals
- Be aware of how food makes you feel, physically and emotionally
- Notice when you are full

Mindful Nutrition and Mindful Eating

In our mind-body skills groups, we consider nutrition and eating as one area in which we can benefit by becoming aware of our patterns, our feelings, our thoughts about food.

Once you realize where you are with regard to your eating, you can set a new direction and make new choices in what and how you eat. Even small changes can have profound effects. As you increase your awareness, your food choices will change more and more easily.

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Increasing awareness can result in better choices:

- Draw your relationship with food (role of food, emotions related to food, how has the past shaped your relationship with food/habits)
- Mindfulness exercise: Use all five sense to become fully aware of how, why, and what you are choosing to eat, and what your food actually smells and tastes like
- Experiment! Small changes in your diet can have profound effects
- Ask yourself "Why am I eating this food?" "Is it out of boredom? Loneliness? Anxiety? Commit to a 7-day food experiment.

This information was taken the Center for Mind-Body Medicine (www.cmbm.org) and was adapted by Minneapolis VA Medical Center psychology staff