

*Those who know that enough is enough will always have enough. – Lao Tzu*

Research indicates that a slower, more thoughtful way of eating can help with weight problems and steer some people away from unhealthy food choices. Applied to eating, mindfulness includes noticing the colors, smells, flavors, and textures of your food; chewing slowly; getting rid of distractions like TV or reading; and learning to cope with guilt and anxiety about food. Experts suggest starting gradually with mindful eating, eating one meal a day or week in a slower, more attentive manner. Here are some tips that may help you get started:

- Before you choose what to eat, try to become aware of what your body needs. Are you really hungry, or are you thirsty?
- Set a timer for 20 minutes, and take the full time to eat a normal-sized meal.
- Try eating with your non-dominant hand. If you are right-handed, hold your fork in your left.
- Try using chopsticks to eat, if you don't normally use them.
- Eat silently for five minutes. Think about everything that it took to produce your meal, from the sun's rays to the farmer to the grocer to the cook.
- Take small bites and chew well. Close your eyes, and focus on the sensory experience of tasting, chewing, and swallowing.
- Before opening the fridge or cabinet, take a breath and ask yourself, "Am I really hungry?" If the answer is no, do something else, like reading or going on a short walk.

John Kabat-Zinn, a scientist, writer, and meditation teacher, uses this famous "Raisin Consciousness" exercise with his clients to introduce the concept of mindfulness:

*Sit comfortably in a chair. Place a raisin in your hand. Examine the raisin as if you had never seen it before. Imagine it as its "plump self" growing on the vine surrounded by nature. As you look at the raisin, become conscious of what you see: the shape, texture, color, size. Is it hard or soft? Bring the raisin to your nose and smell it. Are you anticipating eating the raisin? Is it difficult not to just pop it in your mouth? How does the raisin feel? How small it is in your hand? Place the raisin in your mouth. Become aware of what your tongue is doing. Bite ever so lightly into the raisin. Feel its squishiness. Chew three times and then stop. Describe the flavor of the raisin. What is the texture? As you complete chewing, swallow the raisin. Sit quietly, breathing, aware of what you are sensing.*

Paying close attention to your senses and your body's reaction to the raisin may reveal insight into your relationship with eating and food.

