

FOURTEEN WAYS TO EAT IN THE MOMENT (AND LOVE IT)

Simple strategies for connecting with your hunger
and avoiding stress snacking

By Ellen Seidman

CHANCES ARE, YOU VERY RECENTLY THOUGHT ABOUT EATING or soon will: people make some 200 decisions a day about food and drink, from what to cook for dinner to whether to order the tall or grandé. Given how much consumption is on our minds, the last thing we want to do is obsess over food more—which is exactly why mindful eating may seem unappetizing. Plus, who has the time? The strategy has an unfortunate reputation for involving busywork: incessantly putting down our forks between bites or sniffing every last morsel.

The latest incarnation of mindful eating inflicts none of that torture. “Really, it involves eating with intention and attention,” explains Michelle May, a physician and the author of the *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat* series of books, “so that we eat only when we’re hungry, mostly stop when we’re satisfied and truly enjoy food.”



To tune in to your hunger cues and become a more mindful eater, try these moves.

1. Start with: Do I really want this?

Taking a brief pause before we have that first bite to ask this simple question helps gauge hunger level and assess why we're eating; perhaps it's more out of boredom or fatigue than a response to an empty stomach. "If you're in a car driving cross-country and you see a gas station, you wouldn't immediately pull off—you'd check your fuel gauge," says May. A simple way to remember to do this: leave a stickie on the computer or laptop that reads "Am I hungry?"

2. Actually sit down

Tactics don't get much easier than this: (1) Place butt on seat. (2) Eat. In a study from the University of Surrey in England published in the *Journal of Health Psychology*, dieters ate granola bars while either watching TV, walking at their own pace for five minutes, or sitting and conversing with a friend. Then they were offered additional snacks. Those who had walked ate more of the bonus munchies than their peers—including five times as much chocolate. Eating on the go may make us overeat later on, reports the study's lead author, Jane Ogden, because we don't notice the amount we've already consumed. So when you do go for fast food, make it more of an experience—as in, have it at a table rather than out of the bag.

3. Act like a baby

Tots find food wondrous: they mush it, pummel it and joyfully smear it all over themselves. As adults, though, we tend to just inhale what's on our plates. But by employing what May calls this "beginner's mind-set" to-



ward eating, we can add enjoyment, which provides more satiety and contentment. All we need to do is notice the aroma and flavor of, say, a pizza slice we're about to shovel down—or just how attractive a dish looks, which is why Instagram-ready foods are our friend. Taking time to plate meals in interesting ways ups the pleasure factor. Susan Albers, a clinical psychologist at the Cleveland Clinic and the author of *Eating Mindfully*, recalls a wedding shower where fruit kebabs were served; she watched guests savor them. "People were eating slowly, really enjoying them," she notes. "How different that would have been if they just had fruit in a bowl."



4. Have lunch anywhere but your desk

Actually eat in the break room. Or better yet, take your lunch outside to a bench in a nearby courtyard or park. "Although you can do multiple tasks when you eat at your desk, your brain can only fully pay attention to one thing at a time," explains May—so you won't fully experience your meal and may end up feeling less than satisfied.

5. Create a food speed bump

Doing a mid-meal assessment of whether we want to keep eating can benefit card-carrying members of the Clean Plate Club. May recommends dividing food on our plates in half—just a quick swipe down the middle with a knife or fork—so that even if we're deep in conversation, we're automatically reminded to check in with our stomach.

6. Go wild with Thai takeout . . .

Or any other ethnic cuisine. "One of my favorite tips is to try more foods from other cultures," says Albers. "Say you're eating a new Indian dish. You're likely to slow down, really pay attention to the flavor and wonder, 'What spices do they use?' It's fun, and it shifts you out of autopilot eating."

7. Don't swear off comfort food

The more you forbid yourself delicious treats, the more likely you are to devour them when your defenses are down (say, after a hard day at the office). "Enjoying a favorite food from childhood, like grilled cheese, can add pleasure and comfort to your day," says May. Too bad these foods often come with a side of guilt. To beat that, she recommends that we reassure ourselves, "I can trust myself to eat in a way that nourishes my body and spirit."

8. Have the candy—just don't keep it handy

Renowned food researcher Brian Wansink, the director of the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University, is all about setting up our environment so it works for us rather than against us—and he has an entire book on the topic, *Slim by Design*. In one study he conducted, he found that people consumed 125 fewer calories from Hershey's Kisses at work if they moved the candy dishes from their desks to six feet away from them.

You also get a gut check when you serve food off a counter instead of the table. Wansink discovered that this tweak reduced how much men ate by 28% and how much women ate by close to 10%. Regarding that gender divide, Wansink notes that the men tended to pack away additional helpings while those around them chatted. Needing to get up for their seconds made them less likely to do so.



9. Chew like a cow

No, really, although this is one tactic not to try at a business lunch. Researchers from Brigham Young and Colorado State universities asked one group of people to pay attention to the sounds they made while chewing cookies, pretzels and chips, and another group to eat while wearing headphones. The headphone group ate about 45% more on average than those who could hear their eating. The “crunch effect” suggests that the sound of food is a key sensory cue that helps us regulate how much we consume.

10. Beat buffet syndrome

New research is finding that we can position our bodies to shape the ways we think, act and eat. Called “embodied cognition,” the process involves literally firming our muscles to firm our willpower in order to, say, consume unpleasant medication or resist food temptation. So if we’re faced with a beckoning spread and considering loading more onto our plates, making a fist or crossing our arms can signal our brains to stop. Of course, this also prevents us from using our hands to serve ourselves more baked ziti.

11. Play with texture

Altering food textures wakes up your taste buds and your sense of food adventure, says Albers. Try freezing grapes, dropping whole-wheat croutons over steamed veggies, placing a slice of creamy avocado between layers of turkey in a sandwich or sprinkling crushed salted pretzels over fro-yo.



12. Follow the rule of two

This one’s all about planning your pleasure, courtesy of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab: order a reasonable entrée, plus any two other things you really want, whether that’s a glass of pinot and an appetizer or a piece of pie. “People report eating about 25% less, because it doesn’t leave them feeling deprived,” says Wansink.

13. Clean that cluttered kitchen

True, this tip involves some effort—but it also improves your home decor and possibly your waistline. We’re likely to overeat by as much as 34% when our kitchens are a mess of newspapers on the table, unopened mail on the counter and chairs in disarray, finds a recent Wansink study published in *Environment and Behavior*. “Having a neat eating environment helps you feel like the world is less out of control,” he explains, “and reduces the chances of eating from anxiety.”

14. End the meal on a favorite

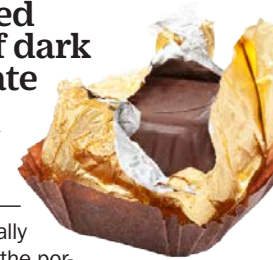
Save the best for last, Albers coaches. “We tend to have a poor memory of what we eat, and finishing a meal on a positive note makes us more likely to encode it in our brains,” she says. “The more satisfied you are after a meal, the less likely you are to eat a lot later.” So if dinner is chicken, salad, mashed potatoes and fruit, but it’s really all about the taters, end on those. The food gods never said we couldn’t have mashed potatoes for dessert.

Foods You Can’t Help But Savor

“We live in a world that stresses instant access and hurrying, and eating is no exception,” says psychologist Susan Albers. Truth is, though, eating slowly has a host of benefits, ranging from feeling full for a longer period of time to taking more satisfaction in what we eat. Even for the fast eaters among us, these nine foods have to be consumed slowly by their very nature—and that’s a good thing

Wrapped piece of dark chocolate

Go with dark chocolate for the antioxidants—and individually wrapped for the portion control. One study found that when people had to repeatedly unwrap pieces of chocolate instead of diving into one big bar, they downed 30% less.



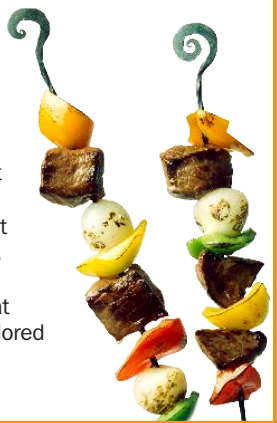
Mandarin orange

Peeling this fruit and breaking out each sweet segment provides a moment of mindful eating.



Kebabs

These everything-on-a-skewer summer party staples are not only portable but also a feast for the senses, thanks to the marinated meat and brightly colored vegetables.



Whole-wheat spaghetti

Concentration is required to fork and twirl this pasta, making us focus on the food in front of us, not the work project due tomorrow.



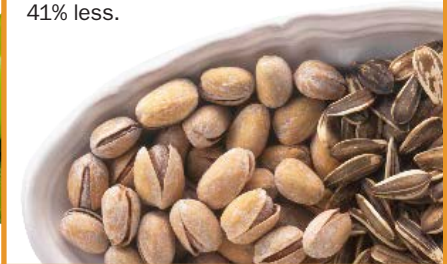
Edamame

We have to work at opening each pod, which keeps this healthy side from being a fast food.



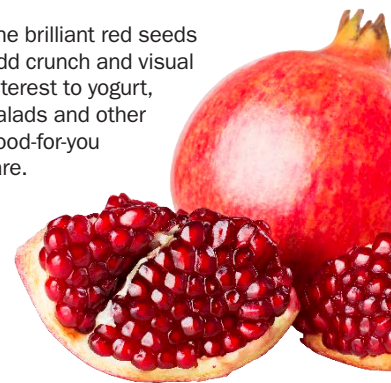
Unshelled pistachios

In a study that compared eating unshelled versus shelled pistachios, noshers who had to crack open the nuts consumed 41% less.



Pomegranate

The brilliant red seeds add crunch and visual interest to yogurt, salads and other good-for-you fare.



Artichoke

The ultimate tactile vegetable, a spiky artichoke forces us to appreciate nature’s packaging as we peel off one petal at a time and pull it through our teeth.



Crab legs

Eating crab legs takes effort, from cracking them to dipping them in butter. The sound serves as a reminder of how much we’re eating (what researchers have dubbed the “crunch effect”).

