

# Making the Shift from Overeating to Mindful Eating



***A lack of awareness around food can manifest in several ways.*** For many people, uncomfortable feelings, habits, and poor coping mechanisms automatically prompt a desire to reach out for food. Whether you find yourself overeating occasionally or frequently, the following tips can help:

## 1 Notice your triggers.

Many of us eat in response to emotional cues like stress, sadness, or anxiety. To discover your triggers, keep a journal for 1 week, noting times that you ate when you were not hungry. What was your state of mind? What event preceded it? Was it an argument with your spouse? A stressful episode with your boss? Emotional eating habits can be unconscious and deeply ingrained. Gaining awareness is the first step to freeing yourself from the cycle.

## 2 Plan your indulgences.

Many people overdo treats like wine, baked goods, and sweets. If you love chocolate, then allow yourself a few squares of high-quality dark chocolate a few times a week instead of a bag of Butterfingers in front of the TV late at night. If you know that you are going to crave sweets after dinner, then keep a few small treats on hand instead of stocking the pantry and freezer with cookies and ice cream. When a sweet treat does pass your lips, no guilt or self-berating is allowed!

## 3 Tune into to your body.

Many of us are not aware of our body's signals of fullness and hunger. This can lead to issues like blood sugar imbalances, overeating, obesity, and digestive issues. Start paying attention to your body's signals throughout the day. As mealtime approaches, close your eyes and notice how hungry you are. Give your hunger a rating on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 being barely hungry, 3 being moderately hungry and 5 being ravenous. Eat when you are moderately hungry (# 3), and not ravenous. If you wait until you are ravenous you may overeat and make poor food choices. During meals, take note and tune into your body again. Stop eating when you are moderately full, not stuffed. Eating slowly and chewing each mouthful completely is very important. It takes the brain approximately 20 minutes to register fullness.

## 4 Experiment with mindful eating.

Before beginning your next meal, take 3 long, slow, deep breathes or say a few words of thanks. Slow down the pace before you begin eating. Observe how the food looks, bring a small bite up to your mouth and smell the aroma, notice the texture and taste. Get in the habit of thoroughly chewing your food. Digestion begins in the mouth. Try counting the chews in each bite. Aim for 20-30 times. It helps if you put your fork down between each bite. The idea is not to eat every bite of every meal in this fashion, but to remind yourself of the difference between unconsciously gulping down food and taking a small bite. For 1 week, do this exercise once a day and observe whether it changes some of your eating patterns. For maintenance, take a few conscious bites at each meal.