MINDFUL EATING

Eating is an important part of life. It provides us with nutrients to keep us alive and healthy, gives us pleasure, brings us together, is part of celebrations, and has personal and cultural meaning. However, much of the time, we don't fully appreciate food and the act of eating. Sometimes, eating can harm us, make us sick, and even kill us. (Remember that 4 of the top ten causes of death in the U.S. are related to how we eat.)

Mindless eating is eating without paying attention to why, what and how we eat.
Mindful eating is paying attention to why, what and how we eat.

Questions for Mindful Eating:

1. Why am I eating? Are you eating because you're hungry? Or are you eating because you're bored, sad, angry or stressed? Emotional eating can lead to overeating and eating too much of foods our bodies don't need, but which give us emotional relief, a.k.a., "comfort foods." Are you eating the food because "it's there"? Are you eating out of habit, because "that's I always eat"?

2. What am I eating?   What nutrients are in the food? Is the food nutritious or is it just empty calories? Does the food contain any harmful ingredients, such as additives? Are you eating this food only because that's what your family or friends eat?

3. How am I eating? Are you sitting down? Are you relaxed? Are you focusing on eating, rather than doing other things (TV, computer, phone, homework, etc)? Are you eating slowly, chewing each mouthful 20-40 times?

Mindful eating allows us to fully experience the pleasures of eating. When we pay attention while we eat, we can better appreciate the tastes, smells and textures of food. When we eat mindfully, we are more likely to eat only as much as our body needs, to eat the right foods in the right amounts and to eat less processed and junk foods. Also, mindful eating is crucial to proper digestion.

Keys to Mindful Eating

1. Eat when hungry or when you need nourishment. Your body will tell you when it needs to eat. However, sometimes you should eat when you're not hungry, such as in the morning, to have energy for exercise, or when you know you will have to go without eating for a long period.
2. Sit down. No matter how small the meal, sit down while eating. This puts the body in the proper state to digest your food.
3. Relax. Take a few slow, deep breaths to relax the mind and body. Eating in a state of tension or stress can cause you to overeat and to eat foods high in sugar, fat and salt, a.k.a "comfort foods." It's also bad for digestion.
4. Don't do anything else while eating. Put all of your attention on eating. Don't read, watch TV, use the computer, walk. This allows you to fully enjoy the food and to hear your body's signals about what and how much to eat.

5. <u>Take small bites.</u> Taste buds are located only on the tongue. Large amounts of food in the mouth are in contact mostly with the cheeks and palate, not the tongue. Small bites allow you to more fully taste the food.
6. <u>Chew food 20 to 40 times before swallowing.</u> Breaking food into small pieces makes it easier for the stomach to further digest it. Saliva contains enzymes that begin digesting food as you chew.   If you pay close attention, the tastes will change as you chew
7. <u>Listen to your body.</u> Notice and feel your body's reactions as you chew and taste the food.
8. <u>Don't take the next bite until your mouth is empty.</u> Swallowing completely before you take another bite will reduce gas and indigestion and slow you down so you don't overeat.
9. <u>Talk only when your mouth is empty.</u> If you want to talk, wait until you've swallowed the food in your mouth. Once you take another bite, don't talk until your mouth is empty again.