



Taste Every Bite

Imagine you are eating a Hershey's Kiss. Before you start to eat it, hold it in your hand. Look at the outside. As you open it, listen to the crinkle of the foil. Bring it up to your nose and deeply inhale a few whiffs of the chocolate. Put it in your mouth and roll it around on your tongue. Try to think about any feelings or thoughts that come to mind.

Welcome to Chocolate Meditation, a way of eating that encourages people to savor every bite and end what some call “mindless eating.”

About 127 million U.S. adults are overweight or obese, according to the American Obesity Association. Many of these cases of overeating could be resolved if people thought about what — and how much — they ate, argues Susan Albers, Psy.D., a Cleveland Clinic psychologist and author of *Eating Mindfully: How to End Mindless Eating and Enjoy a Balanced Relationship with Food*.

“Eating is like tying your shoe or brushing your teeth,” says Dr. Albers. “You just do it in a very automatic or routine way. But when you’re doing this, you aren’t thinking much about what you’re eating. You might get to the bottom of a bag of chips and realize you didn’t taste one single bite. And that’s when you go for more.”

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OUT WITH THE FAD Trendy diets and other weight-loss fads tend to be short-term solutions that don’t provide a conscious, realistic change in eating habits, says Dr. Albers, who counsels patients individually and in group workshops on dietary issues. Eliminating entire food groups or completely denying yourself favorite treats can lead to trouble later on, she warns.

“Anything you take away, you start to crave,” says Dr. Albers. “It’s impossible to cut out everything.”

With Chocolate Meditation, no food is off limits. Dr. Albers, who has lectured widely on the topic across the country, encourages people to be aware of how much, and why, they eat. And although she realizes it may not be practical for every meal, she says this mindfulness still pushes people to think differently about what goes into their mouths.

“I don’t tell people to get rid of chocolate,” says Dr. Albers. “It’s not realistic, and what fun would life be if you got rid of

chocolate? You just need to eat it, or whatever your food of choice may be, in a mindful way.”

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STEP BY STEP Eating mindfully is based on four foundations: mind, body, feelings and thoughts. Before taking a bite, Dr. Albers suggests, people should ask themselves how hungry they are on a scale of one to 10. By constantly checking in with themselves, people can develop a better sense of what their bodies are feeling, she says.

Sometimes these clues are subtle. For example, a person might think they have no energy or are very stressed when they’re just hungry. “It’s really about tuning in to your body and about what your body is telling you,” says Dr. Albers.

Feelings and thoughts also can have a significant impact on how much people eat. For some, these emotions can be positive. For others, eating may be fueled by anxiety, guilt, stress or just boredom.

“The first thing I help people target is rewriting those negative scripts in their head,” explains Dr. Albers. “Just being more mindful of their internal speech affects a lot of what they eat.”

In addition to keeping a healthy eating script in mind, avoid multitasking when eating, she suggests.

“When you eat, just eat. When you’re watching TV and eating, or driving and eating, that’s when your body doesn’t register just how much you’re having.” Also, put food out of sight and make it less accessible, which will discourage the mindless grab-and-eat habit.

“Everybody, no matter where you are in the spectrum of eating, can learn to eat more mindfully,” says Dr. Albers. “This is a long-term approach.” — MEREDITH STANTON

📖 To read an excerpt from Susan Albers’ book, *Eating Mindfully*, or to listen to a podcast by Dr. Albers, go to clevelandclinic.org/ccm.