

Food for Thought ¹⁷³

What is mindful eating?

- Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food preparation and consumption by respecting your own inner wisdom.
- Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body by using all your senses to explore, savor, and taste.
- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating.
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, neutral or dislikes) without judgment.



Turning Your Crave into a Wave

By Ronald Thebarge, PhD



We've all experienced food cravings. We've all at some point continued to eat even after we're full. Or we've felt driven to eat something even though we're not hungry. We've all craved the quick sensation of the bite, a moment of pleasure, only to realize how fleeting it all is. Delight and joy from the morsel rapidly fade, followed by guilt, anger, and often more craving. When mindfulness is applied to craving, we find that the struggle lies not in the object of desire, or even with the urge itself. Rather the struggle lies in trying to get rid of the urge to eat, cursing the fact that it just won't leave you alone. The problem is trying to make yourself *not* have what you clearly already have—a craving—and forgetting that having a feeling, thought, or physical reaction is not the same as acting it out. It is when the feeling flows into action that we feel even more

out of control, and pleasure is followed by dread.

As an antidote to struggling with craving, G. Alan Marlatt, a psychologist with many years of meditation experience, has introduced a technique called "urge surfing." Urge surfing is powerful because it does not try to control the feeling. Instead, we learn to respond to craving with nonjudgmental observation. Craving prompts curiosity rather than an immediate reaction. Left to follow its own path, craving is shown to have a beginning, a point of peak intensity, and a moment when it subsides, just like

a wave. By practicing awareness and observation, we can ride the wave with no desperate attempt to either direct it or escape it. The urge surfer learns that all cravings rise and fall without causing harm, because feeling an urge is not the same as acting on it. With practice, urges become cues for nonjudgmental, nonurgent, mindful observation. With persistence, the waves can be appreciated as part of a natural seascape rather than seen as unnatural disasters.

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Internet Resources

- www.tcme.org
- www.mindfuleating.org
- www.mindfulpractices.com
- www.slowfoodusa.org
- www.mindlesseating.org

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Free Handout for Individuals from The Center for Mindful Eating

Handling Triggers

By Molly Kellogg, RD, LCSW

"Trigger" is defined as anything that serves as a stimulus and initiates a reaction or series of reactions. This implies that every time the trigger is activated, the subsequent reaction is automatic and inevitable.

How often have you heard or said, "That food triggers me to overeat." Or "When I see donuts, I have to eat them." Or "That bad news triggered me to eat." All of these imply the inevitability of mindless eating. Indeed, the "triggers" for mindless eating are often emotional states or the sight or thought of specific (often forbidden) foods.

Shifting the words you use allows more choice. All these "triggers" can be viewed instead as useful information. The impulse to eat when notionally activated is useful



information that something is bothering you. It is not uncommon for the first awareness to be of the desire for food. This desire does not mean food is needed. It does mean (quite reliably) that something is happening. You can choose to use this information to pause and possibly explore your emotional state. (For more useful ideas on response to emotional triggers/cravings, see Food for Thought, Spring 2007.)

When a particular food seems to be a trigger for you, this is useful information that your thoughts about this food are giving the food more power than it deserves. (For more on the thoughts that propel us to mindless eating, see Food for Thought, Spring 2006.)

Pausing is powerful. Research shows that placing a pause or break between the initial impulse to eat and the actual eating decreases the likelihood that you will eat if you are not physically hungry. Search for opportunities to practice pausing and

"Shifting the words you use allows more choice."

attending to your thoughts and emotional states.

Practicing mindfulness daily helps cultivate attending to "triggers" as useful information, rather than as things automatically compelling you to act. You can practice in any number of ways, from formal sitting meditation to yoga to simply taking a few mindful breaths during the day.

Molly Kellogg, RD, LCSW, is the author of *Counseling Tips for Nutrition Therapists: Practice Workbook, Vol. 1* (2006) and a free e-mail series of *Counseling Tips for health professionals*. She is a Board Member of TCME and welcomes comments at mkellogg@TCME.org; www.mollykellogg.com.

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