

MINDFUL EATING: THE FUTURE OF NUTRITION

By Elizabeth Kovar M.A.



It is no surprise that the American culture is stressful, fast paced and often hectic. Americans who struggle with weight are persistently bombarded with the “calories in versus calories out” notion. Although this plays a major role in weight, many people do not realize what they eat along with how they eat is of great importance.

Most fitness professional’s palates desire clean, healthy and organic foods. Often times this food is viewed as nourishing and gives the body vitality. Some people are naturally a fast eater, and some eat at turtle speed. However, if people actually slow down while eating, they may find that chemical-induced and processed, fried foods are actually not as desirable and pleasurable for the brain.

WHY SLOW DOWN EATING?

Human physiology is not programmed to do “everything fast.” Whether one is exercising, running to a meeting or stressing about a recent breakup, the brain triggers “fight or flight,” or the stress response when rushed and hurried. When this occurs, blood flow is removed from the visceral region and sent to the working muscles to flee “danger.” During this time, digestion is turned off and when eating fast, or under a stressful state, people often experience gas, bloating, indigestion and heartburn. During this time, the brain does not fulfill its pleasure seeking hormones, which contributes to the “wait 20 minutes after eating” notion to see if the body is full. Also, this style of eating is truly mindless. There is no mind-body connection between satiety and portion control.

Most optimal digestion occurs when the body is relaxed and triggers the parasympathetic nervous system. When one is relaxed, the blood flow moves to the visceral organs and aides in digestion. When relaxed, the brain seeks pleasure and signals the body when feeling full and satisfied.

Many slow-food movements combine the pleasure-seeking opportunity while dining over quality food with friends and family. Europe has been living this lifestyle for hundreds of years, consuming high-quality fatty foods, wine, bread and meats all while walking, biking and moving around day to day. The “secret” is that they take time to eat meals and find eating as a pleasurable experience and “not something I have to do between meetings.”

Beyond our S.A.D. Standard American Diet, which does not metabolically comply with nutrient-dense foods, our time-stressed culture does play a factor in the life of weightloss.

So if you have a client who is struggling with weightloss, exercises like crazy and counts every calorie, ask them to slow down while eating. Clients should be educated that although the stress at their desk may not go away, they can choose to eat more slowly, or in a more serene environment, even if the meal is taken away from the computer screen or worksite. Unfortunately, there is no escaping human physiological response when it comes to stress and fight or flight.

WHY IS MINDFUL EATING THE FUTURE OF NUTRITION?

As fitness professionals have seen, there is neither a magic bullet nor do the majority of diet plans work long-term. For people who constantly run on the “hamster wheel” of diets and detoxes will discover that there is no other solution for their weight problem. For most people the solution is becoming aware, which is another name for “mindful.”

For most people, not being relaxed, or aware, is part of the culprit. If most people ate fried and processed foods with awareness, they would soon discover that these foods are not pleasurable and nourishing. Becoming aware and mindful takes time, which is opposite of many mainstream marketing programs. Mindful eating is a discovery and process where one gets in-tuned with their physiology and “inner-world.” It allows people to become aware of what foods work and don’t work for their body. In addition, the more aware one becomes, the better the connection between diet, exercise and lifestyle choices. People will start to choose exercise and foods that they enjoy and make them feel good. Most people may not connect the two, but the synergistic relationship helps every aspect of life.

Most people have no other choice besides getting in-tuned with their physiology. And the first way to kick-start this is to slow down, take a few deep breaths and connect with what foods they are eating. **OSF**

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