

Mindfulness of Eating

Tips for this exercise:

- Find somewhere quiet initially to help you practice. As you become more experienced it is useful to practice this whilst you are going about your daily routine, the usual distractions will be there and will increase your skills in noticing when your mind wanders.
- To practice, pick a piece of fruit (I like doing this with a grape or an orange segment), chocolate, anything that you want really! If you want to be really brave, try doing it with something you have never eaten before. I'd recommend cutting up the fruit into a smaller 'part' (or using just one if its grapes, strawberry etc), for example being mindful of an orange segment or apple piece.
- Use all of your senses, what you can see, smell, taste and feel.
- It will be really helpful to practice this daily if you can.

Practice

Find somewhere comfortable to sit and do this practice, turn off any distractions. Sit in an upright position with both feet on the floor and rest your hands on your lap, let your eyes rest with a soft focus somewhere in front of you.

Take the piece of fruit and place it into the palm of your hands. Imagine that you have never seen such a thing before, that this is the first time you are seeing it. Notice its weight sitting in the palm of your hand. Notice where it touches your hand. Now start to pay attention to what it looks like, notice everything about it (pause). You might want to turn it over in your hand, or hold it between your fingers to explore it properly. Notice the colours (pause), any lines or dimples (pause), is the light catching it anywhere? Does it have juice on it? Spend a few minutes really exploring it. Notice any thoughts or judgments that might pop up and gently return to just observing and describing.

Now turn your attention to its smell. Notice any bodily sensations that crop up as you do this, for example did you notice any extra saliva? What kind of smell is it? Perhaps images, or memories might pop up of times you have smelt this before. Try to let these go and return your focus to the piece of fruit. Notice any thoughts or judgements you might experience and gently let them go.

Now bring your attention to its taste. Take a small bite and notice what happens. Without chewing, allow the piece to sit on your tongue and just notice what that's like. Can you taste anything? (pause). Notice any sensations in your mouth, any thoughts or judgements that might pop up. Notice the urge to continue to chew or eat the rest of it, see if you can resist this for a little longer and return to just observing. Notice what's happening to the piece of fruit, is it melting for example? Now bite down once, what do you notice? (pause). When you are ready, swallow the piece you have in your mouth (pause).

Now, slowly eat the remaining bit of the fruit mindfully. Use all of your senses to really pay attention to what the experience is like. Notice the sensations as you chew, the tastes, the smell. Is it soft, hard? Sweet? Sour? Notice any judgements and let them go, returning your attention to your piece of fruit. You may notice that you feel frustrated or impatient and want to eat quicker, that's OK, just notice!

How can this be useful for me?

How often do you really notice what you are eating? I mean, really notice, giving it your full attention. I personally, end up eating at my desk at work, resulting in me not really eating mindfully and often not really noticing what I am eating. Eating can be a real source of pleasure for many as well as something that commonly brings up judgements both to ourselves, towards others and to the food we are eating. Constantly judging ourselves for eating (e.g “I shouldn’t be eating this”), or not paying attention means we either enjoy it less, do not notice when we are full or even noticing when we don’t really like something! Mindful eating can bring new experiences and sensations that we would otherwise be missing out on. It increases our skills in observing our judgements, paying attention to one thing in the moment and can help slow us down a little in a hectic world to just do something for ourselves.