

Mindful Eating

Overview

Mindful eating is a mindfulness practice that helps children develop a deeper connection with food and begin to create lifelong, healthy habits. It encourages children to focus on the present - noticing thoughts, feelings and physical sensations. Connecting this with the food that fuels our bodies helps children to recognize feelings of hunger and fullness, slow down when eating, better digest and fully enjoy snacks or meals!



Take Action

Discover new foods. Mindful eating can be a great time to develop a deeper appreciation for food favorites while also branching out and trying something new. Leverage the [produce of the season](#) for the most nutrient dense (and tasty) treat. By using the five senses, this sensory activity supports children in making “[progress towards produce](#)” - introducing them to a variety of foods to help them develop healthy habits as they continue to grow.

Understand mindfulness. Lay the groundwork and help children understand what it means to practice mindfulness and why it is important. Mindfulness means paying full attention to something - with no distraction, staying in the moment and noticing our thoughts and how we feel (both physically and emotionally). Being mindful means taking our time and staying relaxed.

Encourage children to use the 5 senses and practice small “mindful bites”. Now that children have a general understanding about what it means to practice mindfulness, have them experience their food in a new way. Encourage children to remain present and in the moment by drawing upon their five senses to take small, intention bites.

- *See:* What do you notice? What color is it? What shape is it? What stands out?
- *Feel:* When you hold it in your hand, what does it feel like? Is it soft or hard? Squishy or rough?
- *Hear:* Does it make any sounds? What about if you squeeze it between your fingers? (You can also revisit sound during taste)
- *Smell.* How would you describe the smell?

Invite children to close their eyes as they explore taste.

- *Taste:* Put the food in your mouth. Before you chew, what is the first thing you taste? Is sweet or salty? Sour or savory? As you start to chew, chew slowly and before you swallow, think about the change in flavor, texture and sounds. Does it change the longer you chew?

Explore the mind-body connection. Mindful eating is more than just a few mindful bites. Encourage children to slow down while they eat and begin to understand the mind-body connection a little bit more. All foods carry different nutrients and vitamins - designed to support our growth and keep us healthy and strong. These different compounds can influence the way we feel, including our energy levels that fuel us for the day. Invite students to dive deeper and think about where their food comes from - appreciating the process of growing that one apple or the baking of that slice of bread, the nutrients it contains and what fuels them the most to play and learn.

Social Emotional Health Highlights

Activities such as these help children explore...

Self-Awareness and Self-Management: Mindful eating is one form of practicing mindfulness. This tool can be applied to different situations throughout the day and encourages children to reflect and be more aware. Mindfulness supports the development of critical skills such as focus and concentration as well as self-regulation. Giving children an opportunity to appreciate the beauty of a given moment, helps to build resiliency and put them in tune with their own emotions.

Responsible Decision Making: Supporting children in recognizing when their bellies feel full or when hunger has queued the "low fuel" helps to prevent extremes with eating and creates a healthy, positive relationship with food and its impact on the body and mind. Mindful eating also teaches the concept of mindfulness and how it can be used as a tool to reset and refocus - enabling children to make responsible decisions in response to disruptive emotions.

Tips



Mindful eating can be practiced during snack time, lunch or at home with families. Creating a deeper connection to food can support the development of healthy habits and a positive relationship with food and nutrition.



Practice mindful eating by [limiting screen time](#). Put phones, computers and tablets away. Turn off the television. Limiting distraction helps children stay focused and avoid eating too quickly.



Cooking and eating together is a great way to practice mindful eating. Whether [at home with family](#) or at school with classmates for a taste test or [cooking class](#), it provides an opportunity for children to see their meal or snack come together from start to finish with their own hands.



Mindful eating slows down meal or snack time. It helps children begin to recognize when their bellies feel full or if they are "out of fuel" when running around outside. Encourage children to listen to their tummies and aim to try new things by adding more colors (and nutrients) to their plate.

For more activities and ideas like this one, be sure to [sign up for our news and updates](#). And if you like what

you see, please [donate to support our work](#) creating more ways to help build a healthier future for kids.

Resources

[10 Mindful Eating Tips for Kids \(Parents\)](#)

[Foodie U: Mindful Eating for Families \(California State University Center for Healthy Communities\)](#)

[Social Emotional Learning Competencies \(CASEL\)](#)

[imHealthy Mental Health Lessons \(Michael Phelps Foundation\)](#)

Healthy Cooking Club

Cooking with kids is a great way to educate them about good nutrition, what's in season, planning and preparing meals, and reading food labels.

Food Art

"Playing with your food" by creating food art is a great way to introduce healthy foods in a fun and interactive way.

SMART Goals for Health and Wellness

Encourage children to set SMART goals around nutrition and wellness in order to become healthier and happier versions of themselves.

Offer Healthy Snacks

In addition to nourishing bodies, snacks provide an opportunity to practice healthy eating habits.
