

Food for Thought

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.



Free Handout for Individuals from *The Center for Mindful Eating*

Shopping Mindfully

By Donald Altman, M.A.

The idea of “mindful shopping” might seem like an oxymoron – two ideas or words that could never go together. This is especially true in the U.S., where the average shopper is over stimulated an every way possible, from TV shopping networks to giant superstores that offer everything imaginable in family-sized quantities. Did you ever stop and consider how many advertisements, distractions, or unwanted messages you see or hear in a single day? For starters, advertising reaches you in numerous ways, including television, the Internet (pop-up windows and e-mail), telemarketing, junk mail, product placement in movies, advertisements placed either in or on magazines, newspapers, billboards, buses, benches, elevator walls, gas pumps, and buildings. No wonder it is estimated that the average adult is bombarded with 3,000 ads a day! That is probably a conservative number.

Thirty years ago the business of advertising caught the attention of Philip Brickman and Donald Campbell, two psychologists at Northwestern University to develop the theory called the hedonic treadmill. Their concept explained that people are genetically wired to seek out what is novel and pleasurable. People get a positive feeling, or reward, from buying novel things – new food items, clothes, electronic gadgets, jewelry, etc.. Like an addict, regardless of how much pleasure is

initially derived, it takes more and more of the “consumption drug” to feel the same high feeling. Before long, we are on the treadmill, and things we never cared about before become things we now can’t live without.



When we think about food as a consumable -- a novel thing that can give a person pleasure -- an individual may now experiencing this same hedonic treadmill effect. A person may find that he eats far more than is necessary simply because it takes more and more food to feel good. For an individual who is struggling with compulsive overeating, the hedonic treadmill effect can be heightened by the thought that this special food might run out. Let’s call this phenomenon “the scarcity treadmill”.

For tens of thousand of years in human history we didn’t know where that next meal would be coming from. Our genetic wiring helped us overcome this by telling us to fill up and consume as many calories as possible. Unlike the hedonic treadmill, which is driven by pleasure and reward, the scarcity treadmill is driven by fear, anxiety, and worry. This scarcity treadmill can have a profound effect on a person’s thoughts, food choices and eating behaviors. How? Many large and members-only stores offer food tasting along with an abundant display of food that are

designed to trigger the urge to spend money. Combined with a “limited time offer” or a “special value size”, marketers are able to use fear and anxiety associated with the scarcity treadmill to entice a purchase -- even when it is not desired or necessary.

So when you are shopping take a moment and let yourself look with ‘fresh eyes’ at the abundance and variety that is before you. Ask yourself: Is the eye-catching colors helping me make a choice or is it filling me with fear that my usual choice isn’t good enough? If you are going to purchase some fresh food notice the variety -- not only in types but in color, the shape and packaging that is before you. Then ask yourself: Is the variety filling me with a sense of appreciation for the abundance that has graced my life or is it filling me with fear that the food I choose won’t be quite right or I might need more?

Choosing to become more mindful while shopping can help you become aware of which environments help you feel confident regarding your selection. This confidence can also extend to increase your enjoyment while eating.

Internet Resources

www.tcme.org

www.mindfuleating.org

www.mindfulpractices.com

www.balancedweightmanagement.com

www.slowfoodusa.org

