Mindfulness and Weight Loss
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Why do people overeat?

People overeat for different reasons. Some common reasons are as follows:

**Habit:** If you usually eat at a particular time of day, in a particular place, or in response to a particular thought or feeling, over time this may become a habit. Habits can be difficult to break because we tend to carry them out automatically, without really thinking about them.

**Mood:** People often eat in response to stress, tiredness, boredom, or when they’ve simply had a bad day.

**Food cues:** For many people, the sight or smell of tasty food can elicit a strong desire to eat, even in the absence of hunger.

References: Cleobury & Tapper (2014); Verhoeven, Adriaanse, Evers & de Ridder (2012).

How can mindfulness help?

Mindfulness-based eating interventions

There are a number of different mindfulness-based eating interventions. The evidence for these varies; whilst some have shown effects on weight loss, others place more emphasis on psychological variables such as body acceptance or specific types of eating such as binge eating.

Useful link: www.thecenterformindfuleating.org


Mindfulness strategies that can be used alongside other weight loss programmes

Less research has examined the effects of individual mindfulness-based strategies on eating behaviours. However, there is evidence to support the beneficial effects of two strategies...

1. Focus on the sensory properties of your food as you eat

Asking individuals to attend to the taste, texture, and smell of the food they are eating can help reduce food intake later in the day. This is thought to work by enhancing the person’s memory for the food they have eaten. This memory is then used to interpret subsequent physiological cues which in turn help the individual eat an appropriate amount.

References: Robinson, Kersbergen & Higgs (2014); Higgs & Donohoe (2011).

2. Try to see yourself as separate from your thoughts and feelings

A number of different strategies can be used to encourage individuals to see themselves as separate from their thoughts and feelings (for example the ‘Mindbus’ technique). Several studies have shown these to be useful for helping individuals resist tempting foods. How these work is not entirely clear, though it’s possible they help the individual keep their health and weight loss goals in mind. They may also help break habits where the person has a tendency to automatically eat in response to particular thoughts or feelings.


Further reading

Brian Wansink. (2011). Mindless Eating. Why We Eat More Than We Think. Whilst this book isn’t about mindfulness, it offers useful insights into the ways in which we eat without thinking. It also provides helpful, evidence-based tips.