Mindful eating

Each day we make around 200 decisions about eating but 90% of these decisions are made without any conscious thought. It is easy to eat without even "tasting" food which makes it hard for our brain to register that we have eaten and to allow us to feel full.

The concept of mindfulness is being present and aware in the moment. Mindfulness can be applied to many aspects of life and particularly to food. Mindful eating is being aware of hunger, food and eating.

Mindful eating can:

- increase enjoyment and satisfaction with meals.
- increase our awareness of feeling full and so reduce our risk of overeating.
- enhance our ability to moderate our food intake and enjoy meals without guilt.

Our busy lifestyles are a significant barrier to eating mindfully. The pressure on our time means that we often eat on the run and family dinners can be eaten in shifts. Gobbling down food as we run out the door or eating in front of a screen disconnects us from the experience of eating.

How do I eat mindfully?

Eating mindfully means using all your senses whilst eating and acknowledging how you are feeling before and during eating. Take the time to …

1. Determine your actual hunger before snacks and meals. Are you really hungry or just grazing from habit?
2. Look at the food and appreciate the colours and components.
3. Smell before you start eating to take in all aspects. Touch if appropriate or look carefully to appreciate the texture of food.
4. Taste the food by chewing carefully, savouring the mouthfeel and pausing between mouthfuls – putting down your cutlery can help to slow down your eating. Remember it takes 20 minutes for our brain to register that we are feeling full.
5. Acknowledge your reactions to the food you are eating– does it make you feel happy or uncomfortable?

Remember to enjoy your food and make eating an occasion to be savoured.