

# Ask an Expert: Eleven Ways to Stop Overeating Using Mindfulness

Cindy Nelson

01/13/2017



Often a new year

brings resolutions to get healthy, eat better and lose weight. As most of us know, this is much easier said than done. It becomes more difficult when we have issues with challenging work schedules, family responsibilities and the office candy bowl that is so tempting. Mindless eating can sabotage our resolve, so what can we do about it?

“Most of us don’t overeat because we’re hungry,” said Brian Wansink, Ph.D., author of the best-selling book [Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think](#) and the John Dyson Professor of Consumer Behavior at Cornell University. “We overeat because of family and friends, packages and plates, names and numbers, labels and lights, colors and candles, shapes and smells, distractions and distances, cupboards and containers.”

He attributes rising [overweight and obesity](#) rates in America to the availability of food, the affordability of food and the attractiveness of food. The solution, however, is not to make food less available, affordable or attractive. The solution is to change your personal environment, Wansink said.

Mindful eating is defined as deliberately paying attention; being fully aware of what is happening both inside and outside yourself – in your body, heart and mind – and outside yourself, in your [environment](#).

Wansink made the following suggestions for changing our thought process and our environment to improve our resolution success and create better long-term eating patterns:

**1) Smaller plates.** Using a 9.5-inch plate vs. a 12-inch plate means smaller portions and feeling fuller after eating an entire plate of food. Studies have shown food consumption is 22 percent lower when eating from a smaller plate.

**2) Smaller serving utensils.** “Mini-sizing” utensils can reduce the amount of food consumed.

**3) Out of sight, out of mind.** Keeping serving bowls and entrees away from the dinner table can prevent second and third servings.

**4) Easy access.** Making healthy foods more accessible in cabinets, cupboards and even the refrigerator encourages healthy choices.

**5) Control portions.** Wansink found that people eat much more food when given unlimited quantities. He advises people to eat smaller [portion sizes](#) in smaller packages.

**6) Eat when you’re hungry.** Let actual hunger cues, not emotions, guide your eating. Substitute a quick walk for a snack until actual hunger sets in. But don’t wait until you’re famished and binge on unhealthy foods.

**7) Plan.** Prepare healthy snacks ahead of time to eat throughout the day. A 200-calorie, whole grain, high-fiber snack can satisfy hunger between meals. [Fiber](#) keeps you feeling full longer.

**8) Keep a food diary.** Write down everything you eat and what was happening at the time to identify food triggers – hunger, stress, excitement or boredom. Be careful not to obsess over every calorie. The new [American Heart Association diet and lifestyle guidelines](#) acknowledge that overall eating patterns, not occasional indulgences, are what are most important to maintaining a healthy weight and lifestyle.

**9) Slow down.** Here’s where mindfulness can really come into play. During each meal, chew slowly, savoring each bite; put your fork down between bites; and stop eating to take a drink of water (not a sugary soda). This gives the body enough time to signal to the brain that it’s satisfied, not stuffed.

**10) Pay attention.** Don’t eat in front of the TV or computer, while standing at the kitchen counter or talking on the phone. This can lead to losing track of how much you’ve consumed.

**11) Use technology.** “We can actually use our smartphones and other electronic devices to help us,” said Riska Platt, M.S., a registered dietitian and certified nutritionist for the Cardiac Rehabilitation Center at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York. “There are now apps that manage food records, count calories, help you track what you eat and even provide guidance on healthy food choices at the grocery store and restaurants.”

Source:

- [Using Mindfulness to Stop Overeating](#)

By: Cindy Nelson, Utah State University  
Extension assistant professor  
What Next? Get useful tips like this as soon as we release them. Sign up here.