

REACH QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

MINDFUL EATING

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DEAR REACH FAMILIES,

Because the holidays are such a crazy time when it comes to food, we thought we would provide you with some tips on “mindful eating.” These don’t just pertain to the holidays, but they seemed timely. All of this is based on research that psychologists have conducted. We hope you find these hints useful – if not entertaining.

Vicki Helgeson

WHAT IS MINDFUL EATING

Mindful eating is eating with intention and attention. This means you are eating because your body needs fuel and you are eating with the intention of caring for yourself. One of the most important questions to ask yourself when it comes to responsible eating is: “Am I Hungry?”. By asking yourself this you can become more aware of what is triggering you to navigate towards the fridge. Are you truly hungry, or are you stressed, bored or upset?

FOCUS ON EATING

You have all probably heard that watching television is associated with weight gain. One reason is because you are doing something that is not active instead of doing something that is active. But there is another interesting reason that I know will hit home with some of you. You eat more sitting in front of the television than sitting at the kitchen table. Why? Because you are paying attention to the television and not paying attention to what you are eating! So you just keep eating and eating – until maybe you get to the bottom of the bowl or the bag?

The same holds for reading a book or listening to music. If your mind is on something else while you are eating, you are “mindlessly” eating and you eat more. We eat less when we are focused on eating. So, either eat at the table free from distraction or, if you must eat in front of the television, set out a specific amount of food on a plate or bowl instead of bringing the entire bowl or bag to the sofa! This will also help you identify whether you’re eating because you’re bored, or if you’re actually hungry and eating to nourish yourself.



CLEANING YOUR PLATE

Did you grow up with parents who told you that some kids are starving and that you needed to clean your plate? I did. The problem with cleaning your plate is that sometimes there is too much on your plate. You may have seen the "refillable soup" episode on Candid Camera years ago. People came into the restaurant and they gave them a bowl of soup. The people didn't realize that the bowl was attached to the table and that there was a tube beneath the table refilling the soup as the person ate it. The bowl never emptied. When an experiment was conducted, researchers found that people ate 50% more from a refillable bowl than a bowl that actually emptied. (See the statistics below)

	REFILLABLE BOWL	NONREFILLABLE BOWL
SOUP CONSUMED	15 Oz.	10.5 Oz.
CALORIES PERSON ESTIMATED CONSUMED	127	123
CALORIES ACTUALLY CONSUMED	268	155

That being said, be aware of how much food you are putting on your plate in the first place, which is especially hard during the holidays. Second, eat slower and listen to your body as you eat, you may get full long before you've cleaned your plate, and that's ok!



SIZE-CONTRAST ILLUSION

Look at the two orange circles. Does the one on the left look larger than the one on the right? The two dark circles are the same size. This is called the "size-contrast" illusion. So now you may be wondering – what does this have to do with my life? Imagine that the orange circle represents a helping of pasta and the grey circles represent your plate.



The message: use smaller plates! The same portion of food will look larger on a smaller plate. With the "clean your plate mentality," it is best to use smaller plates!

SEGMENTATION

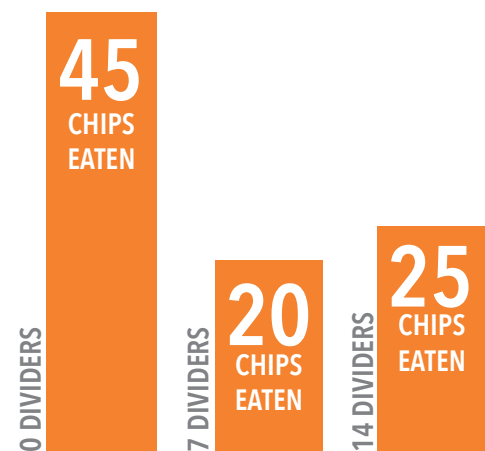
What is segmentation? Segmentation is a visual marker that can be used to tell you how much you are eating. In one study, researchers used segmentation to indicate to participants how many stackable potato chips they were eating. Participants were asked to watch a movie and given a can of stackable potato chips containing 82 potato chips along with a bottle of water. Participants were randomly as-signed to one of three groups:

1. A can of stackable potato chips with no dividers
2. A can of stackable potato chips with a red potato chip appearing after every 7 chips
3. A can of stackable potato chips with a red potato chip appearing after every 14 chips

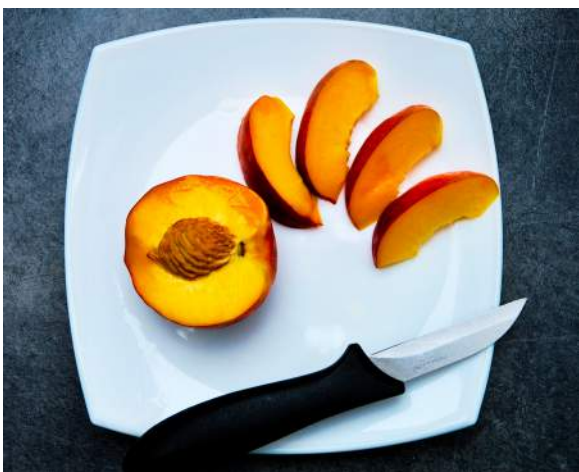
The participants were told ahead of time that there might be an occasional red chip in the batch and not to worry about it. Participants in the conditions with the red dividers never stopped eating when they saw the red chip, so they didn't seem to be concerned about them. After the experiment was over, the number of chips eaten was counted. Participants ate much fewer chips (see right) when there was a red chip appearing after every 7th or 14th chip.

One reason for the finding is that the red chip dividers were a cue to participants as to how many chips they were eating.

Participants without the dividers were also much less accurate than participants with the red chip dividers. They didn't realize how many chips they had eaten. This study shows that portion-size packaging can help to reduce how much we eat. Eat from a single portion bowl or pack a smaller sized container, rather than eating from the entire bag of snacks.



SMALLER SNACK SERVINGS



Do you buy your food in bulk? It's a common way to save money by loading up on the larger packages at discount stores. However if you're eating directly out of those giant packages, you eat significantly more than when you eat from smaller packages. However, you don't have to let your money saving habits hurt your waistline. When you buy large packages, measure out individual servings into sandwich bags or smaller travel containers. This habit will help your wallet and your waistline!

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

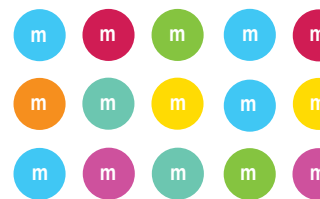
We are more likely to eat easily visible food on the counter than food in the depths of the refrigerator. Use this to your advantage! Leave a bowl of fruit or veggies out on the counter and put the cake away in the fridge. It even helps to organize your refrigerator in this way too: place healthy foods at eye level and move the less healthy food to the bottom shelves. Always avoid leaving open containers of cookies or unhealthy snacks on the counter. It's just too convenient to have too many snacks when they are right there!

VARIETY

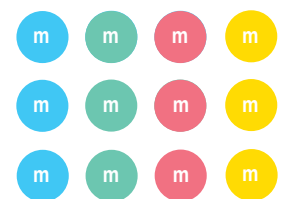
Having variety in food can be incredibly useful or hurtful for your mission to eat healthy. Studies show that having a variety, in color or type of food, will cause you to eat more. If your goal is to simply eat less it is better to put fewer foods on your plate. You will not eat as many calories if you have 2 foods on your plate than if you have 5 foods on your plate. (Yes – this is part of the problem with Thanksgiving!) Several research studies have shown this to be true.

When people are given a bowl that has either 4 colors of M&M's or 7 colors of M&M's, people eat more when they see 7 colors than 4. The M&M's on the left show an example of how less variety can be used for smarter snacking solutions. However, eating healthy isn't always eating less. You can use variety to your advantage for eating healthier. Replace that bowl of M&M's with vegetables. You'll eat more vegetables if you have a variety of veggies than if you're eating only broccoli. During the holidays, fill your plate with lean protein and plenty of different types of non-starchy vegetables and you'll feel much better about what you've eaten when you're full.

Portion of M&M's with 7 colors



Portion of M&M's with 4 colors



We hope some of these helpful hints
will get you through the holidays.

Vicki Helgeson