**Day 27**

**Title: Mindless Eating**

Let’s face it: you’re a very busy person. You’re probably multitasking as you read this article. No slacking here--you’ve got to make every minute count, right? Multitasking can be helpful when it comes to getting everything marked off your “to-do” list, but when you multitask while eating, most likely all you’re getting is a larger waistline.

**What in the world is mindless eating?**

Eating on the go, nibbling at everything you see, and not remembering what or how much you ate are all symptoms of mindless eating. Its underlying cause is paying attention to everything except the act of eating. In other words, distraction. When it comes to food, distraction can be a harmful thing. Your body send signals to tell you when you’re hungry and when you’re full. When you eat mindlessly, those signals get drowned out by whatever else you’re paying attention to. Obeying external cues instead of your body’s own signals can lead to overeating. Here are some examples of what mindless eating looks like:

* Letting a clean plate be your guide: Serving utensils, bowls, and plates are all external guides to eating. Studies have found that people who eat mindlessly tend to eat more, the more they’re served. Instead of listening tointernal cues to satiety, or fullness, telling them when to stop eating, mindless eaters keep eating until their plates are clean.
* Grazing and nibbling: Candy dishes, snacks in the office break room, and food almost everywhere makes it really easy to eat all the time. Food that is available and in sight creates a cue to eat. While one or two M&Ms might not be so bad, a candy dish sitting on your desk makes it easy to indulge more than you think.
* TV time: Watching tv while eating dinner leads people to eat more. It also creates in your mind that tv=food, so even if you’ve already had dinner, you’ll automatically want to munch on something while you catch up on your shows.

**How to overcome mindless eating**

Now that you know how mindless eating can sabotage your attempts to eat a healthy diet and stick within a calorie goal, what do you do about it? There are a few things you can try:

* First, pay attention to what you eat while you’re eating. Turn off the tv, put down your smartphone, and enjoy your food. This will help you to notice your body’s signal saying when you’re hungry and when you’re not. Wait to eat until you’re hungry. When you’re no longer hungry, stop eating.
* Keep snack food out of sight. Or, if you need help getting in all your fruits and vegetables for the day, switch out a candy dish for a fruit bowl. Put cut-up vegetables in clear containers in the refrigerator, right where you’ll see them when you open the door.
* Shrink your plate. Lots of plates and bowls today seem better suited for a giant, rather than a regular human being. It’s natural to want to fill up the plate, so you’re more likely to add more food than you need. And once it’s on the plate, it’s really easy to clean that plate. Downsize your plates and eat less. If you’re having a hard time finding smaller plates, try using salad plates instead of a dinner plate.
* Set a pattern to your eating. Limit external cues to eating by setting specific times and places to eat. Have dinner at the dinner table, not the tv tray.

**A final word**

You didn’t start eating mindlessly in a day, and you most likely won’t stop in a day, either. Don’t be discouraged if you still grab your phone to scroll through emails while you eat your breakfast. The first step in paying attention to your food is recognizing where you’re distracted. Start incorporating some of the practices covered in today’s article, and you’ll be on your way to overcoming mindless eating. Tomorrow’s article will cover more techniques to help you eat mindfully, instead of mindlessly.

**Sources:**

Cohen, D., & Farley, T. A. (2008). Eating as an automatic behavior. Preventing Chronic Disease, 5(1), A23. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18082012>

Ogden, J., Coop, N., Cousins, C., Crump, R., Field, L., Hughes, S., & Woodger, N. (2013). Distraction, the desire to eat and food intake. Towards an expanded model of mindless eating. Appetite, 62, 119–126. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2012.11.023>

Rolls, B. J., Morris, E. L., & Roe, L. S. (2002). Portion size of food affects energy intake in normal-weight and overweight men and women. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 76(6), 1207–1213. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12450884>

Wansink, B. (2007). Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think. Bantam Books. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books/about/Mindless_Eating.html?hl=&id=_fTMqYS_8LcC>