

Food for Thought

What is mindful eating?

- Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food preparation and consumption by respecting your own inner wisdom.
- Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body by using all your senses to explore, savor, and taste.
- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating.
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, neutral or dislikes) without judgment.

Free Handout for Individuals from The Center for Mindful Eating

The Healing Power of Compassion

By Donald Altman, M.A., LPC

We live in a culture where high achievement and perfectionism are lauded and desired traits. And yet, when it comes to eating, perfectionism can lead to feelings of failure, loss of self-confidence, and shame. The good news is that compassion is the salve that heals the wounds caused by self-criticism and self-blame.

The early meaning of the word compassion is “to be with suffering.” Certainly, food and eating perfectionism causes suffering because it is unrealistic and not sustainable. The idea of attaining perfection with anything—especially with regard to eating, finding ‘perfect’ foods, or maintaining the perfect diet—inevitably leads to frustration and loss of self-esteem. That’s because

perfectionism is unforgiving and leaves no room to be flexible and adaptable. Remember, the rigid and brittle branch snaps in two during a windstorm while a flexible branch can bend and not break.



A compassionate approach to eating helps you be flexible, letting you bend and not break emotionally when things don’t go as planned. Author Pema Chodron asks some questions that can help you find the path to compassion, when she writes, “Right now, today, could you make an unconditional relationship with yourself? Just at the height you are, the weight you are, the

amount of intelligence you have, the burden of pain that you have?”

Anytime that you feel self-blame or that you have “failed” with food, know that you have many more meals to eat in a lifetime. Each meal offers you the opportunity to practice compassion toward yourself. Invite compassion into your life, one bite, one meal at a time. Let it help you welcome flexibility and patience into your life.

Donald Altman, LPC, is a psychotherapist, former Buddhist monk, award-winning writer, and author of the new book *One-Minute Mindfulness*. Other books include *12-Weeks to Mindful Eating*, *Meal By Meal*, *The Mindfulness Code*, and *Art of the Inner Meal*. Donald consults and leads mindfulness workshops around the country. He currently serves as Vice President of TCME. His website is www.mindfulpractices.com. Contact: info@mindfulpractices.com