

Beating the diet trap

- mindless versus mindful eating

Despite your best efforts to stop dieting, you may still be restricting your eating without even realising it.

We read it everywhere these days - dieting is no longer the healthiest way to lose weight. So how do you go about eating healthily without falling victim to the dieting trap? The answer may be to better understand your eating style.

There are many eating styles that are actually unconscious forms of dieting. In fact, it is very common for many people to say they are not on a diet, but upon a closer inspection of what and how they eat, they are in fact still dieting!

So what are some common eating (or dieting) styles to be aware of.



Cautious eater	Fitness and health	Appears to be the ideal eater. However anguishes over each food morsel and its effect on the body. On the outside, this person seems health and fitness oriented.
Unconscious eater	Eating while doing something else at the same time	This person is often unaware that he/she is eating, or how much is being eaten. To sit and eat is mostly seen as a waste of time. Eating is usually paired with another activity to be productive.
Hectic – unconscious eater	Overscheduled life	This person's eating style is haphazard – typically eat 'n' go when food is around. Thrives on tension.
Can't stop – unconscious eater	Presence of food	This person is especially weak to lollies, or food offered in meetings or food lying around in the kitchen
Waste not – unconscious eater	Free food	This person's eating drive is influenced by value for money, and is susceptible to all-you-can-eat buffets.
Emotional – unconscious eater	Unconformable emotions	Stress or uncomfortable feelings trigger eating episodes, especially when alone.
Conscious/professional dieter	Feeling fat	This person is continuously restricting their eating, or dieting. They often use the newest 'whiz-bang' diet plan.
Mindful eater	Biological hunger	This person makes food choices without experiencing any guilt or dilemma. They honour their natural hunger, respect stomach fullness, and enjoy the pleasure of eating.

How can this information help you? Well, unconscious dieting is the main demon here, and it usually occurs in the form of meticulous eating habits. There is in fact a very fine line between eating for health, and dieting. As long as you are engaged in some form of restrictive eating, you will never be free from food rules and body image worries. Whether you are a conscious, or an unconscious dieter, the result will always be the same – the diet trap.

Eventually the various eating styles of the Cautious Eater, the Professional Dieter, and the Unconscious Dieter will become an ineffective way of eating and managing weight. On the surface these eating styles appear tolerable, but below the surface they are very restrictive and result in harmful yo-yo dieting. This means in the beginning, a new diet may seem exciting and promising, but eventually the recurring feelings of eating deprivation, hunger, food cravings, loss of control, and guilt begin to sneak back in. This type of restrictive eating, often leads to prolonged dieting and a loss of your natural ability to eat mindfully.

There is good news though, it is possible to take back control and reverse damaging dieting behaviours. Becoming a mindful eater is a positive first step, which will help you end chronic dieting. Mindful eaters follow their own natural hunger signals, and eat whatever they choose without feeling guilt or anxiety. The mindful eater is an unaffected natural eater, who is happily able to manage their way through life without suffering weight management pressures.

Here are my ten top tips for becoming a mindful eater and enjoying better health:

Reject the diet mentality – Throw out the diet books and magazine articles that offer you the false hope of losing weight quickly, easily, and permanently.

Make peace with food – Call a truce and stop the food fight. Give yourself unconditional permission to eat. If you tell yourself that you can't or shouldn't have a particular food, it can lead to intense feelings of deprivation that build into uncontrollable cravings and, often bingeing. When you finally give in to your forbidden foods, eating will be experienced with such intensity it usually results overeating and overwhelming guilt.

Challenge your old beliefs – Say “no”

to thoughts in your head that declare you're “good” for eating under 250 kilojoules, or “bad” because you ate a piece of chocolate cake. These unreasonable food rules have been created from years of dieting. These beliefs are found deep in your psyche and give rise to negative thoughts, hopeless phrases, and guilt-provoking indictments. Removing the unreasonable food rules from your life is a critical step in returning to normal eating.

Honour your hunger – Keep your body fed biologically with adequate energy and healthy carbohydrates. Otherwise, you can trigger a primal drive to overeat.

Feel your fullness – Listen for the body signals that tell you that you are no longer hungry. Observe the signs that show you're comfortably full. Pause in the middle of eating and ask yourself how the food tastes and whether you feel full.

Discover the satisfaction – In our fury to be thin and healthy, we often overlook one of the most basic gifts of existence – the pleasure and satisfaction that can be found in the eating experience. When you eat what you really want, in an environment that is inviting, the pleasure you derive will be a powerful force in helping you feel satisfied and content. By providing this experience for yourself, you will find that it takes much less food to decide you've had enough.

Cope with your emotions without using food – Find ways to comfort, nurture, distract, and resolve your issues without using food. Anxiety, loneliness, boredom, and anger are emotions we all experience throughout life. Each has its own trigger, and each has its own appeasement. Food won't fix any of these feelings. It may comfort you for the short term or distract you from the pain. But food won't solve your problems. If anything, eating for an emotional hunger will only make you feel worse in the long run. You'll ultimately have to deal with the source of the emotion, as well as the discomfort of overeating.

Respect your body – Accept your genetic blueprint. Just as a person with a shoe size of eight would not expect realistically to squeeze into a size six, it is equally futile to have a similar expectation about body size. Respect your body so you can feel better about



who you are. It's hard to reject the diet mentality if you are unrealistic and overly critical of your body shape.

Exercise and feel the difference – Forget militant exercise. Just get active and feel the difference. Shift your focus to how it feels to move your body, rather than the energy-burning effect of exercise. If you focus on how you feel from working out (such as being energised), it can make the difference between rolling out of bed for a brisk morning walk, or just hitting the snooze alarm. If when you wake up your goal is to lose weight, it's usually not a motivating factor in that moment of time.

Honour your health with gentle nutrition – Make food choices that honour your health and taste buds while making you feel good. Remember that you don't have to eat a perfect diet to be healthy. You will not suddenly get a nutrient deficiency or gain weight from one snack, one meal, or one day of eating. It's what you eat consistently over time that matters. Progress, not perfection, is what counts.

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