End Mindless Eating

In this on-the-go society, people often eat mindlessly – not really aware of what or how much they are eating. You can make more mindful choices of what you eat by making small adjustments in your food and drink choices without depriving yourself of the foods you love.

Stop eating on auto-pilot! Stay mindful when you are choosing and eating food by thinking about what you are doing. One of the easiest and quickest ways to decrease mindless overeating is to make small adjustments to your daily environment and routine.

Top Ten Ways to End Mindless Eating

1. **Am I hungry?** Avoid popping food into your mouth mindlessly. First, notice whether you are actually hungry before you eat. If you aren't, you might feel like eating simply because you saw food, you are bored, or because it is mealtime.

2. **Don't let yourself get too hungry!** Eating is more satisfying when your are hungry but if you're starving it is harder to make mindful choices about what and how much you eat. If you're famished, eat something small to take the edge off then proceed to eat slowly so you don't overdo it.

3. **Choose the healthiest food you can without feeling deprived.** Studies have shown that people on a low-fat diet consume as much as 14 percent more than regular fat food! When you think you're eating less, you may end up eating more. Choosing low-fat or reduced calorie foods is a great strategy but don't tell yourself you can eat more because of it!

4. **Eat from smaller plates and bowls.** You've heard this before but try it out for yourself with the "You Plate It" Challenge. Next time you eat dinner, first fill your dinner plate with the foods you intend to eat then fill a small salad-sized plate with those same foods. Look at both plates side-by-side. Did you take more food when you used the larger plate. Now, eat your meal from the smaller plate and stop when you feel comfortable. Do you think you would have eaten more from the larger plate? **People typically eat more food off of large plates than they do off of small ones, but feel equally full.** If you have to use a large plate, try to fill half of it with vegetables first and pay attention to how you feel as you eat. Remember, if you're still hungry, you can always go back for more.

5. **Use smaller serving spoons.** Here's another eye-opening challenge: Put both a small and large spoon in one serving bowl of food and watch your family members fill their plates. Which spoon did they use most, the big one or the small one? Now notice their plates. Did the ones who used a smaller spoon take less food? Did the people who used the larger spoons take more food? What size spoon will you serve with in the future?

6. **Put your food on a plate instead of eating straight from bags, boxes or containers.** One experiment showed that people think a brownie on a nice plate tastes better, and is worth twice as much as the same brownie served on a napkin. Eat from a plate and you'll probably eat less but enjoy it more.

7. **Buy food in smaller containers.** In one study, people were given popcorn in two different sizes: medium and extra large. The people with the extra large size ate an average of 53% more than those given the smaller containers, even when the popcorn was stale! They ate more simply because the container was larger so order or serve yourself smaller sizes to decrease automatic overeating.

8. **Watch those super-sized drinks.**

   Cups and glasses can also be deceiving. One extra-large drink at the local convenience store can have as much as 600 calories! Many people will buy the largest drink they can get because they think it is a good value. But remember, when you eat or drink calories you don't need, its no bargain! Besides water satisfies thirst best.

9. **Don't clean your plate.** Stop eating when you begin to feel satisfied even if there's food still left on your plate or on the table. Fifty-four percent of American adults try to finish everything on their plates, probably because they were forced to clean their plate to earn dessert or taught not to waste food when they were children. Eating food you don't need IS wasting food! Instead package up the leftovers for another meal. You'll enjoy it more when you are hungry.

10. **Be mindful of your activity level too.** Watching TV can be a triple threat because not only is it sedentary but the habit of eating while you sit there is fueled by all those commercials! Look for opportunities to move more — take the stairs, pace while you are on the phone, play with the kids or walk the dog.

Wansink, Brian, James E. Painter, and Jill North (2005). "Bottomless Bowls: Why Visual Cues of Portion Size May Influence Intake." *Obesity Research* 13:1 (January), 93-100.