

## **“See Food” Diet versus Mindful Eating**

*By Janet Hackert, Nutrition Specialist*

Many people have informed me that they were on the “see-food” diet – they say, “I see food, and I eat it!” What if there were another way, a way that might help avoid the extra and unwanted calories? Mindful eating might be just the ticket.

In the May, 2011, issue of Nutrition Action Healthletter, Brian Wansink of Cornell University reports on studies that show the wide variety of ways we, in the United States, are unaware of what and how much we are eating. Most of the ways show how people fool themselves into eating more than they need. Most people eat more when they have food handy, like a candy bowl on the desk instead of across the room or office. They tend to eat faster and so eat more if they are eating with someone who is eating quickly. They also eat more if the evidence of how much they have eaten, like chicken wing bones, have been removed. Serving the food family style, leaving it on the table while they eat, also makes a difference. For example, men eat about 29% more and women eat about 10% more if the food stays on the table instead of being left on the counter during the meal.

It is so easy to not pay attention to what is being eaten and to let that mindlessness lead to added, unwanted calories and excess body weight. Mindful eating is just the opposite: being very aware of how much and what we are eating. Here are some ways to be more mindful.

- Measure the amount you eat before you eat it and set the rest out of reach
- Pause before you begin to eat to get focused on enjoying the meal or snack
- Make eating the sole event – avoid multi-tasking while eating so you can pay attention to what you eat
- Focus on what you eat – notice the color and look of it, its smell, texture, taste, temperature, and flavor – and enjoy it!
- Slow down and chew food thoroughly
- Pay attention to fullness cues—if you are still hungry, continue; but when you feel full, stop

Without awareness, eating can become overeating. Mindful eating can increase the pleasure involved in eating and also reduce how much is eaten.

For more information on this or any other subject, contact your local University of Missouri Extension office. MU Extension programs are open to all.

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