

## How does mindful eating differ from other weight management approaches?

Mindful eating is a tool that can help you work on a range of personal eating and weight goals. However, **mindful eating is probably very different** from other “diets” and approaches to weight management that you may have tried or heard about. Diets and food plans give you **rules** about what you can and can’t eat. This can feel **restrictive** and **depriving** – even more so the longer you try to follow a diet. You may be trying this app because you haven’t been satisfied with the way you have been managing your weight up to this point. So take a chance and try something different! The reason that many people have a hard time losing weight or maintaining a healthy weight is that many beliefs about how to lose weight are simply not correct. The claims you so often hear about how to lose weight really fast are often exaggerated and don’t work. Even people who are successful in losing some weight quickly with traditional diets tend to have a hard time keeping it off because those strategies are too hard to keep up over the long run!

Our strategy is: **DON’T TRY HARDER – TRY DIFFERENT!**

**Mindful eating provides an alternative to diets and the struggle to count calories, follow food plans, or eat certain foods and avoid others.** With mindful eating, you pay close attention to your stomach cues of hunger and fullness, and you use those to guide your eating. You also **pay attention** both to what you want to eat *in the moment* and to how eating those foods and amounts makes you feel *afterwards*. You use **awareness of your body** and your reactions to food to decide what and how much to eat! Mindful eating **doesn’t set rules** about the type of food you eat. You can still eat your favorite foods, you just make sure to not eat too much no matter what you eat!

Diets are difficult for people to follow long-term because the rules are *unrealistic* and because people feel *deprived* of foods they enjoy. Mindful eating is **easier to maintain** in the long run because you aren’t following rules; instead, you’re using your body to guide your eating. This feels much **more natural** and **gets easier over time** (because it’s how we are innately designed to eat).

## How can mindful eating help you attain your weight goals?

If your goal is . . .

- **to maintain your current weight**, mindful eating can help you stay at a healthy weight without feeling obsessed with food. You’ll notice that when you consistently stop eating before you get too full (no matter what you’re eating and how good it tastes!), your weight stays surprisingly stable. Compared to a diet, if you are working to maintain your weight using mindful eating, you are less likely to feel deprived or resentful. This is because you are focused on eating what tastes good to *you* and feels good in *your* body—rather than what other people are eating, what you “should” eat, or what other people think you should be eating. Making eating decisions is also less stressful when

you rely on *your own* experience instead of rules and ideas about what is “good” or “bad.” You gain confidence that you can trust yourself to make mindful eating decisions most of the time, and are compassionate with yourself when you make mistakes. You focus on learning what to do differently next time.

- **weight loss** (*and you aren't aiming for an unhealthy low weight*), mindful eating can help you lose weight without feeling *too* restricted. To lose weight with mindful eating, you may not be able to eat everything you want (or at least as much as you'd like!), but you don't have to go hungry or feel deprived of your favorite foods! With mindful eating, you learn to give up the eating that you know will **not feel “worth it”** later on (e.g., so food that doesn't taste that good anyways, doesn't actually fill you up, doesn't make you feel better emotionally, or doesn't make your body feel that great). Mindful eating is more flexible and also more forgiving than a diet, which helps you to stick with it! After an eating episode that wasn't very mindful, you don't think “I blew it!” and say “What the heck?!” and give up on your eating and weight goals. You are compassionate with yourself rather than self-critical and you focus on working to eat more mindfully the next time you eat. The emphasis on self-compassion and learning (but not judging) keeps you motivated so you can make progress towards your weight goals.
- **weight gain**, mindful eating can help you achieve and then maintain your goal weight in a way that is healthy and helps you feel in control of the weight gain process. Feeling in control helps reduce your worries about gaining too much weight or gaining too quickly. With mindful eating, you will learn to trust your body to help you achieve a weight that is healthy *for you*. You'll gain weight by becoming more aware of your hunger, honoring it (rather than ignoring it), and committing to eat enough to meet your body's needs. Mindful eating also helps you become more comfortable eating and enjoying a wider range of foods—without worrying about not being able to stop eating those foods. You focus on eating things that you enjoy and that will feel good in your body, and know that you can stop at moderate fullness. Overall, mindful eating helps you gain confidence in your ability to eat in a way that you can feel good about.