


Lifestyle Matters

Sample of Mindful Eating Workbook



This workbook is intended as a resource to be used along with the *In the Moment - Mindful Eating* phone app. By completing the exercises in the workbook and practicing what is learned by using the app, a user will move toward healthier attitudes about eating for healthier choices overall. Wellness points can be awarded for completion of the exercises contained in the workbook, providing an incentive to employees to engage in the process.

Contact Kim Flannery for more information about bringing healthier habits to your workplace.

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This excerpt contains one of 9 modules included in the full-size workbook, in addition to the Summary, Author's Reflections, and Author's Biography. The full list of contents in the complete book contains...

- What's Behind Eating Behavior
- Starting Where We Are
- Physical Factors
- What Research Says About Healthy Eating
- Setting Up for Success
- Taste & Pleasure Considerations
- Emotional Eating: Why It Happens
- Emotional Eating: What We Can Do
- Setting Boundaries
- Learning to Kindly and Intelligently Wiggle the Boundaries
- Putting it All Together.

MODULE 2: Physical Factors

How would you fuel your body if you were a machine – with none of the complicating human factors?

Let's start with the basics of healthy eating! Everyone must feel physically satisfied. Allowing oneself to get over-hungry is not an effective way to maintain a healthy body or a healthy weight.

Your body will give you the valuable information you need to learn what will meet your physical needs. By tuning in to the subtle sensations of different levels of hunger, your energy level, and overall sense of wellbeing, you will improve your ability to make healthier choices for your unique body.

The body has many methods of protecting itself from starvation. It constantly monitors blood sugar and fat stores, along with many other measures of fuel status. Hunger is the body's way of signaling a need to eat, and the longer the message goes unanswered, the more desperate the sensations can feel.

In the long run, do you think mere willpower will win when we try to resist the natural desire to eat that is part of our evolutionary survival mechanisms? Drastic reductions in calories that are typical of many weight loss plans often cause impressive weight loss for a while, but most people gain most or all of it back, because the physical drive to get enough to eat is very strong.

Work with your body, not against it! Start by taking a curious, non-judgmental look at how different foods affect your body. This will help you see the opportunities for fueling more effectively on an appropriate number of calories – the key to staying healthy and fit.

Learning Activity:

Keep a journal each time you eat for a week. Focus on physical sensations, including hunger, but also energy level, comfort level of your digestive tract, etc.

Example:

Date	Time	Foods Eaten (Include Quantities)	Physical Hunger (Before/After: 1-5*)	Other Physical Sensations
Example	8:30am	1 bagel with a thin layer of cream cheese, 1/2 banana, 1 cup milk	2-before 4-after	Noticed I felt less tired after I ate, feel refreshed and motivated to work



*1 is uncomfortably, desperately hungry and 5 is stuffed to the point of discomfort. 3 is comfortable.

At the end of the week answer the following questions the best you can. "I just don't know" is a fine answer. You are here to figure this out. Remember that you are working on "cleansing" any information that no longer serves you. This is your time to take a fresh look at your physical needs.

These are foods that really work well for me when I'm hungry:

I have medical reasons for eating or avoiding certain foods. (List the food(s) and the reason.)

When I eat _____, I don't feel my best.

I feel moody when I eat _____.

Foods that cause me to feel energetic are _____.

How I feel when I eat lots of processed foods: _____

How I feel when I eat mostly "clean" unprocessed foods: _____

I consume caffeine daily. ___yes ___no

If you consume caffeine daily, what effect does it have on you?

I consume alcohol regularly. ___yes ___no

If you regularly consume alcohol, what effect does it have on you?

What other observations have you made about how food affects your body?



AUTHOR'S REFLECTIONS: The Importance of Choice

Personal choice is important!

We want to feel that we have picked the very best option. My daughter, for instance, visits multiple stores before she will buy one pair of shoes, even if the first pair she sees is just right. She would be unhappy if I picked a pair for her, and equally dissatisfied with a very limited selection.

It may seem that getting what we choose is the hard part, but it may be just as difficult to make conscious choices – those that reflect our true desires – in the first place. The advice “Be careful what you wish for” is wise advice, because few people know exactly what will make them happy.

Most of us spend a lot of time trying to get the things, or live the life, that we THINK will make us happy. We pick up messages throughout our lifetime, from the world and our life situations (external) as well as from our own self-talk as we process our experiences (internal). It can be difficult to sort through the phantom messages and clearly identify our heart's desires. This is certainly true when it comes to eating.

External Messages

We absorb verbal and non-verbal messages from parents, friends, co-workers, significant others, not to mention the many media messages. Some common ones in our thin-centric culture: “If you don't lose weight, no one will love you.” “You shouldn't have another piece of that. It is REALLY high in calories.” “You are unhealthy because you are above ideal body weight (as defined by a chart).” As if that is not confusing enough, there are contradictory messages everywhere: “Eat this. It will make you happy.” None of these messages are innately true. Unexamined and blindly accepted, any one of them can cause suffering if it does not mesh with personal truths and desires.

Internal Messages

Internal messages can be just as confusing and can lead us away from what we really want. Experiences can be interpreted in many different ways by different people, so what we think is “true” is really only our version of reality. It is the brain's job to interpret what our senses bring to it. Depending on an individual's past experiences, and probably also depending on a person's unique nature, the brain processes events and comments internally in ways that continue to shape our ideas about what we want, as well as what we fear and what causes pain.

Self-talk is often unconscious and judgmental, giving it significant power to trick us into believing the messages we “hear” but don't really listen to. “I should not have eaten that. I am disgusting. I knew I had no will power.” Internal comments like this can mask the truer messages that come through when we set aside judgment and fear – when we are really “listening”.

A Mindful Approach

Try “watching” your thoughts sometime without judgment and see if you gain any new insights about their value for you. This can be helpful regardless of whether there is an external message to process or an internal message pops up spontaneously. All of a sudden, you may find yourself observing and asking questions, instead of passing judgment. For example, “I have no self control with food” can become “I feel out of control with food now. That is interesting. It feels uncomfortable to feel this way, but I will sit with that feeling for a minute and see what I learn. I wonder if there are things I can do to set myself up to feel more in control in the future.”

Try to catch yourself in old patterns of negative thinking. When you can say, “Aha! Listen to what I am telling myself! I see myself heading toward a downward spiral”, you have an opportunity to take a couple of deep breaths and regroup. By staying vigilant and receptive long enough to feel calmer, you allow a more productive thought process to emerge. All of a sudden, you may see options you never knew existed – and you may be willing to try something new.

Reactive Choices Are Not True Choices at All

In addition to internal and external messages, there are human push-pull reactions that further complicate the picture. Some people tend to be more “pleaser” personalities, while others are more rebellious by nature. I think most of us display some of each, depending on the topic and our past experiences. Either way of thinking can separate us from true choice, because both are a reaction to something outside ourselves.

Again, just noticing this can help. I have known people who grew up with a parent who was very controlling about their weight and what they ate. Even though parents want to be helpful, comments about weight and eating can be emotionally charged for the child. Eating behavior is often the outward expression of complex feelings that are not understood. The child’s reaction often becomes either rebellious – “I will eat whatever the hell I want!” (often in private) – or appeasing, like the child who obsesses over food and weight from an early age in hopes of avoiding disapproval.

Both of these reactions to external pressures, while different, can continue into adulthood and may feel like true desires because they are so well practiced. Often, however, they are not real choices at all. The very nature of reacting implies something outside oneself that essentially forces a specific choice, which makes it not a real choice at all. In fact, familiar reactions make it more difficult to truly choose a comfortable way of eating. I have seen adults who finally understand this about themselves. It can be life changing when the light bulb goes on and they see that they are not really getting their way at all.

Choosing a Plan

Finding a way of eating, your own “plan” that works with your unique biology and lifestyle, should feel good. It should allow you to enjoy eating, find a healthy weight (although perhaps not an “ideal weight” in a chart), and not obsess about food choices. In short, it should allow you to be healthy and lead an interesting, fulfilling life!

Question how you REALLY want to eat. You might say, “Of course I would eat cake and ice cream all the time, if you want the truth.” Still, I think that is just an example of what many people THINK they SHOULD want if they could choose anything. Because food marketing in our culture is so taste-focused, I wonder if we really understand the question “What would you choose to eat if you could eat anything?” Many people would interpret the question to mean “What would you like to TASTE at this moment if you could eat anything?”

Unless you are self-destructive, you really do not want to eat cake and ice cream all the time. When it comes to eating, true desires are a blend of taste preferences for pleasure and nutritional value for health and hunger satisfaction. True desire also includes a bit of acceptance for human imperfection to keep anxiety at bay. In other words, we want to feel successful, even if we are not perfect.



A successful eating lifestyle should allow you to answer “yes” to all of these questions:

- Is there consistent evidence (scientific studies, for instance) that supports eating this way most of the time (for health and well-being)?
- Do I seldom have frequent strong cravings?
- Do I feel peaceful and stable overall when I eat this way?
- Is my energy level and mood generally good overall?
- Do I enjoy eating?
- Do thoughts of food take up an appropriate amount of “head space”? In other words, do I have a rich and interesting life that is not completely food-focused?
- Am I usually free of guilt about my food choices?
- Do I see my eating lifestyle in flexible terms?
- Do I always know I am in charge of my food choices?

Feeling that the choice is yours will allow you to drop much of the emotion involved in food choices. Then amazing changes can occur. All of a sudden, rules can become tools. In other words, there is freedom to choose appropriate guidelines, tips, and boundaries. They will finally make sense! If you have resisted setting limits on eating, you may find that guidelines, either general or more specific, can actually provide more peace and trust when they have an understandable purpose. It is entirely different than having someone else impose boundaries that do not make sense. Know yourself, and devise a custom plan that works most of the time. Reach for help with the process if need be.

By all means, modify the plan as needed to fit real life changes. That is intelligent. Different general plans for different situations need not be complicated. For example, a 30 second thought process is enough time to modify a basic plan for a night out. “I will have no more than 2 glasses of wine, no dessert, and any entrée I like, but I will eat slowly and stop when satisfied.” That is one possible plan modification. Again, if you choose it, you can probably do it.

Summary

As you begin to define your true choices, you will slowly notice your eating moving toward a more balanced approach that incorporates pleasure and health. You may also notice that food begins to fit differently into your life in general. It can still give you pleasure, and even occasionally relieve stress, but other “solutions” will arise when you observe without judgment. Eating will take its place as just one of the pleasures of your life and will fuel you for all that you want to accomplish.

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Kim Flannery lives in Milwaukee, WI. She holds a degree in Environmental Science from the University of Virginia. Her career in health and wellness began with an exercise focus fueled by her personal interest in staying fit, which led her to pursue a Certificate in Dietetics from Mount Mary College. She became a Registered Dietitian in 1999, and in 2001, she accepted the role of Nutrition Director at the Wisconsin Athletic Club, where she has served clients ever since.

As Kim worked with more and more people seeking weight loss and a healthier lifestyle, she realized that the widespread dieting mentality was not really helping anyone. Most of her clients needed two things: a healthy dose of kindness and to feel supported when they were having a food crisis. The *In The Moment* app was born in response to these needs.

Kim's mission is to help people learn to make decisions based on self-love and kindness. Discovering the root of eating behaviors and creating a mindful environment in which to make decisions about food are the core of her program. These tools are now available to all through this book and the *In The Moment* app.

