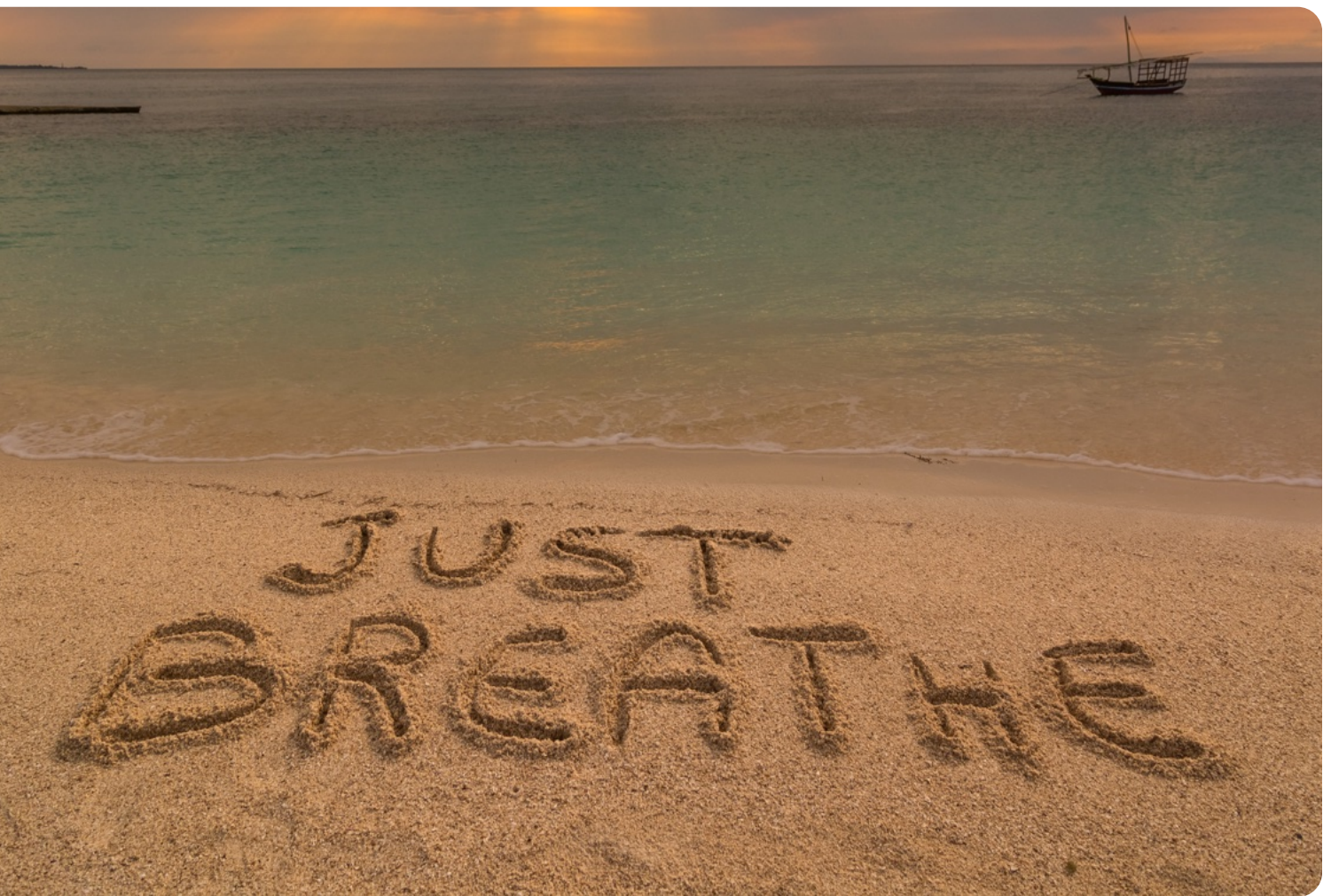




Mindfulness & Stress

- Mindfulness, stress management and breathing techniques.
- Mindful eating habits and hunger cues.
- Reducing emotional eating, boredom, triggers and cravings.
- Mindfulness, stress management and breathing techniques are all interlinked and have a positive contribution to mental and physical wellbeing.

Mindfulness

Is being fully present and engaged in the moment without judgement. Observe your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations as they arise but don't get caught up in them.

Being mindful reduces anxiety and stress by focussing on the present instead of dwelling on past regrets or future worries. Focus and decision making is improved, resulting in better mental clarity. Self awareness is enhanced, as is emotional regulation.

Mindfulness practices:

Mindful meditation

Sit quietly and focus on your breath and body sensations or chant a mantra.

Body scan

Bring awareness to different parts of the body to release tension.

Mindful eating

Pay attention to the eating experience, noticing the taste, texture and smell of the food you are eating.

Stress Management

Chronic stress can lead to health issues including heart disease, depression and a weakened immune system, so managing stress is important.

Stress management techniques

- Time management – prioritise tasks and set realistic goals to reduce overwhelm.
- Physical activity – exercise releases endorphins which are the body's natural stress relievers.
- Relaxation practices – such as Yoga, tai chi, Pilates and other gentle movement practices promote relaxation.
- Cognitive strategies – reframe negative thoughts and maintain a positive outlook.
- Talk to friends or family you trust for emotional support or to discuss stressful experiences.

Breathing Techniques

Controlled breathing directly influences the parasympathetic nervous system, 'rest and digest' calming the body, helping us to relax which is important for mindfulness and stress management.

There are many breathing techniques such as:

Belly Breathing (Diaphragmatic breathing) – inhaling deeply into the abdomen and allowing the belly to expand. Exhale fully and release tension.

This method reduces blood pressure, slows the heart rate and calms the mind.

Box Breathing – Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts. This method balances oxygen and carbon dioxide and improves focus.

4-7-8 Breathing – Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 7 counts, exhale for 8 counts.

This method promotes deep relaxation and is especially helpful for sleep.

- Mindfulness brings awareness to stress triggers allowing you to intervene earlier.
- Stress management techniques prevent a build up of stress.
- Breathing techniques counteract the physiological effects of stress.
- When practiced consistently resilience and wellbeing are improved.

Mindful Eating

Involves bringing full awareness to the experience of eating, noticing the physical sensations, thoughts and emotions involved in the process.

Being aware of hunger and fullness cues which can promote a healthier relationship with food.

Mindful eating habits

- Eat slowly and chew food properly, take smaller bites and chew each mouthful thoroughly to savour the flavours and textures. The brain has more time to register fullness which helps reduce overeating.
- Minimize distractions focus solely on your food so you enjoy it and feel satisfied with what you have eaten. Avoid eating while watching TV or scrolling on your phone or when working.
- Engage your senses and notice the colours, smells and presentation of your food before eating it.
- Portion control and serving appropriate portions helps avoid mindlessly overeating. Smaller plates and bowls will help to manage serving sizes.
- Consider your food choices and pick foods that nourish your body and align with your wellbeing goals. Balance indulgences with nutrient rich options and don't feel guilty for the choices you have made!
- Practice gratitude and pause for a minute to appreciate the effort, time and ingredients that went into your meal.

Understanding hunger cues

Mindful eating involves distinguishing between physical hunger and emotional or situational triggers to eat.

Types of hunger cues

Physical hunger has a gradual onset and can be felt as a growling in the stomach, feelings of low energy or difficulty concentrating. Eating in response to physical hunger helps to meet the body's energy needs.

Emotional hunger is a sudden craving triggered by stress, boredom or emotions rather than being physically hungry. It is often linked to specific comfort foods which can lead to overeating.

Situational hunger is a mindless habit such as snacking in front of the TV or during a movie or eating at a party when you are not hungry, you just eat out of habit or social pressure.

Hunger scale

Rate your hunger on a scale of 1 (starving) to 10 (overly full).

Aim to eat when hunger is around 3-4 and stop at 6-7 (comfortably satisfied).

Pay attention to signs of hunger such as a growling stomach and fullness where you want to be satisfied but not feeling stuffed.

Avoid emotional eating

Before you eat pause and ask yourself if you are actually feeling hungry. Ask yourself if you would like an apple to eat, if the answer is 'no' you are probably eating out of emotion or boredom. Use other coping strategies like distraction, go for a walk or immerse yourself in a hobby, journal or do breathing exercises to reduce emotional triggers.

Mindful eating is beneficial in many ways:

Better digestion – eating slowly and chewing food thoroughly helps digestion.

Weight management – awareness of hunger and fullness prevents overeating.

Reduced emotional eating – identifying emotional triggers promotes healthier coping mechanisms.

Enhanced enjoyment – being fully engaged with what you are eating increases satisfaction, reducing the need for excessive portions.

Improved nutrition – better choices lead to more balanced and nutrient dense meals.

By eating mindfully and tuning into your hunger cues, you develop a better, more satisfying relationship with food, as well as improving your physical and emotional health.

Reducing emotional eating

As this is the practice of consuming food in response to feelings rather than hunger, it often leads to overeating, feelings of guilt and difficulties achieving health and wellbeing goals. If you start to understand and manage your boredom, triggers and cravings, you can help yourself to break this cycle and create a healthier relationship with food.

Strategies to reduce emotional eating:

Identify emotional triggers

Common triggers are stress, sadness, loneliness, boredom or even celebration.

Keep a food journal to track what you are eating, how you are feeling and what triggers you to eat when you are not physically hungry.

Develop non-food coping mechanisms

Replace emotional eating with activities that help reduce the underlying emotion, such as:

- Stress Relief with breathing exercises, yoga or taking a walk.
- Distraction with something else, read, draw or call a friend or family member.
- Comfort yourself spending time with a pet, meditate or journal.

Practice mindful eating

Ask yourself if you are physically hungry?

When you are eating, engage all your senses as you eat, to build your awareness of what you are eating and reduce impulsivity.

Manage stress

Chronic stress elevates cortisol, increasing cravings for high fat and sugary foods.

Techniques such as mindfulness, regular exercise and adequate sleep can lower stress levels and reduce reliance on food for comfort.

How to combat boredom eating

- Recognise boredom as a trigger and differentiate between true hunger and eating for stimulation. If you are unoccupied and feel the urge to eat, it may be due to boredom.
- Keep a list of non-food activities to engage in when you are bored, such as puzzles, crafts, learning new skills or gardening.

- Set regular meal and snack times to create structure in your day to reduce grazing and impulsive eating.

Managing triggers

Address your environment

Avoid keeping 'trigger foods' easily accessible, knowing they are present may be too much of a temptation for emotional eating. Stock up on healthier options such as fruit, nuts or Greek yoghurt.

Address specific triggers

If social events trigger overeating, practice portion control or eat a healthy snack before you go out. If workplace stress triggers overeating, keep healthy snacks available and take regular breaks to decompress.

Self compassion

Acknowledge and accept your emotions without judgement. Replace self-criticism with self-compassion to reduce the likelihood that you will use food for comfort.

Reducing cravings

Cravings are intense desires for specific foods, often unrelated to hunger. You can use a combination of strategies to manage cravings:

Understand the root of the cravings

Cravings may be physical, indicating a lack of nutrients or irregular eating patterns. **Or** Emotional and linked to stress, boredom or memories.

Balance your diet

Eat balanced meals with protein, fibre and healthy fats to promote satiety and stabilise blood sugar. Stay hydrated as thirst is often confused with hunger.

Delay and distract

When a craving occurs, wait 10-15 minutes, engage in a non-food activity and see if the craving subsides.

Practice portion control

If the craving persists, be mindful and have a small portion to satisfy the desire without overindulging.

Substitute healthier options

Swap processed snacks for healthier alternatives such as:

- fresh fruit if you crave sweets
- air popped popcorn or nuts if you crave a salty snack

Reducing emotional eating and cravings long-term

Be aware of your emotions

Regular mindfulness practice will improve your ability to recognize and process your emotions without turning to food.

Develop a healthy relationship with food

Avoid labelling foods as 'good' or 'bad'. Have occasional indulgences without feeling guilty to reduce the cycle of restriction and overeating.

Create a support system

Share your goals with trusted friends or family for accountability and encouragement.

Engage in regular physical activity

Exercise releases endorphins, which improve mood and reduce cravings.

Seek professional help when needed

If you are struggling with emotional eating despite trying to resolve the issue yourself, seek professional help for tailored strategies and support.

Reducing emotional eating requires self-awareness, practical coping strategies and a commitment to change.

By managing boredom, identifying triggers and addressing cravings, with a mindful approach, you should be able to create a healthier, more balanced relationship with food and your emotions.

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