

Are You a Distracted Eater?

Objective

To become less distracted when you are eating and to eat less during the day.

You Should Know

Multitasking while you eat, like watching television or working on the computer, can be a contributing factor to your overeating. However, if you slow down and savor your food, you are more likely to be aware of when you are full and to eat smaller amounts of food.

Research indicates that distracting yourself while you are eating can lead to obesity and binge eating for a variety of reasons:

Distracted people tend to:

- Eat faster.
- Eat more snacks.
- Feel significantly less full even after eating a meal.
- Eat more during meals.

Slowing down your eating and paying attention to your eating will help you listen to your body telling you it has had enough food. It actually takes about 20 minutes before your brain recognizes the signal from your stomach that you are full and if you are hurrying while eating, or you're distracted by other activities, you're more likely to eat more than you need within that 20-minute time frame.

Eating is a time to connect with your body while nourishing it. Healthy eating means creating an optimal eating experience that is relaxed and free from distractions. Eating should be a pleasant experience, and, of course, nutritious eating is vital to your health. So pay attention while you are eating! It's important to your health.

Assessing Your Distracted Eating Habits

Directions: Mark the activities that you frequently engage in while eating:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking on the phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing school lunches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Driving | <input type="checkbox"/> Walking around |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Performing household chores | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading (newspaper, magazine, or book) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creating a to-do list | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing games on your phone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Checking social media on your phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Checking email or voicemail |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watching TV or a video | <input type="checkbox"/> Working at your desk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Posting online | <input type="checkbox"/> Surfing the Internet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Texting | <input type="checkbox"/> Watching television or a movie |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Review what you checked off, then consider how often you engage in distracted eating:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Every Meal | <input type="checkbox"/> Most Meals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Only certain meals (circle): | Breakfast Lunch Dinner Snacks |

What are some of the reasons you think you eat while engaging in other activities?

- I am bored while I'm eating.
- I prefer to avoid conversation with others, so I try to appear "busy" while I'm eating.
- I have so much to do that I have no time to sit down and focus on eating.
- I just like doing several things at a time.
- I feel guilty if I don't do something while I'm eating.
- I just can't imagine what it would be like to eat without doing any other activity!
- I eat most meals alone and doing something else keeps me from feeling lonely.

Now that you have learned something about how you distract yourself by eating, it's time to commit to eating meals without doing anything else.

Here are some ideas that can help you focus on your eating. Put a check by the ideas that you think you would try.

Eat while sitting (not standing) and designate one spot for eating—kitchen or dining room.

Set a regular place setting (plate, utensils, napkin) each time you eat.

Create a pleasant environment at the place where you eat (e.g., light a candle, put flowers on the table).

Don't bring anything to the table with you: no electronics, books or papers, work of any kind.

Don't eat with the TV on.

Put everything you are going to eat for that meal on your plate and stop eating when your plate is empty.

Consciously try to slow down while you eat, paying attention to the sensory experience of eating. Some people refer to this as Mindful Eating.

On the next page is an eating chart that can help you change your habit of distracted eating. Make additional copies of this chart and see if you can record your eating habits for at least one week. Use the chart each time you eat, even for snacks.

Think About It

What do you think is the biggest obstacle to your eating without distractions?

What other changes in your daily habits do you think will help keep you from overeating?

Habits are hard to break. Can you think of anyone who can help you break the habit of distracted eating?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
