

## Cooking Mindfully

### Mindfulness

Intervention

30 min

Client

No

Mindfulness is related to but does not equal meditation. Although mindfulness and meditation are related, the range of practical mindfulness exercises extends vastly beyond formal meditation practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Mindfulness can also be practiced informally by bringing mindful awareness to routine activities that are typically performed regularly, often daily. Most routine activities require little conscious attention because they are highly automatized. Examples include taking a shower, doing the dishes, or driving or walking to work. The idea is to focus attention entirely on the activity, the body movements, the sight, and the sensations. When thoughts or other distractions emerge, one notices them and brings back attention to the task at hand. For instance, when eating mindfully, one eats slowly, directing his or her attention at the experience in the present moment, which includes physical movements, the taste and smell of the food, and the like. Thus, rather than doing multiple things at the same time (such as reading while eating, talking on the phone while driving home, thinking about work while taking a shower), one adopts a single focus of attention.

Cooking and eating provide a precious opportunity to practice mindfulness. Preparing and eating food with mindfulness enables one to connect with the experience in a way that promotes presence, patience, and gratitude, as opposed to being distracted, stressed, or frustrated. Cultivating mindful awareness around food preparation and consumption allows us to enjoy our food more and feel more satisfied after eating (Bays, 2017).

Within the field of positive psychology, the concept of being mindfully engaged with our feelings during positive events (like eating something delicious) is associated with increased happiness (Jose, Lim, & Bryant, 2012). Also known as 'savoring,' this process involves bringing your awareness and deliberate conscious attention to the experience of pleasure. Savoring involves cognitive and behavioral processes that regulate positive feelings, that is, thoughts, and behaviors that influence the frequency, intensity, and duration of positive experience, including joy, pride, gratitude, awe, and pleasure. Just like mindfulness, the skill of savoring can be developed through practice.



### Author

This tool was created by Lucinda Poole (Ph.D.).



## Goal

To develop both mindfulness and savoring skills in the context of cooking, eating, and beyond.



## Advice

- While this meditation builds mindfulness and savoring skills in the context of cooking and eating, these skills are transferable to the rest of one's life. A useful exercise would be to explore ways in which your client may begin to be more mindful and savor other experiences in life, such as spending time with loved ones.



## References

- Bays, J. C. (2017). *Mindful eating: A guide to rediscovering a healthy and joyful relationship with food* (Revised Edition). Shambhala Publications.
- Bryant, F. B., & Veroff, J. (2017). *Savoring: A new model of positive experience*. Psychology Press.
- Jose, P. E., Lim, B. T., & Bryant, F. B. (2012). Does savoring increase happiness? A daily diary study. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 7*(3), 176-187.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. Hachette.

# Cooking Mindfully

## Instructions

In this exercise, you will practice mindful cooking, followed by mindful eating, with an additional focus on savoring your experience. The idea is to slow down and bring your full attention to the pleasurable experience of cooking and eating.

### Part 1: Prepare meal

1. To begin, bring your full attention to the first step of the food preparation process. Perhaps you are chopping vegetables, pouring oil into a pan, or bringing water to the boil.
2. Engage your sense of sight by examining the different things that you can see in front of you. Notice the different colors, shapes, and textures you can see.
3. Next, engage your sense of hearing by listening to different sounds that you are creating. With curiosity and openness, allow each sound to arrive at your ears. If you can, let go of the meaning of these sounds and listen to them as they are.
4. Continue with the cooking process and engage your sense of smell to notice different fragrances that arise. Notice how the addition of each new ingredient affects the overall fragrance of the dish.
5. Each time the mind wanders off into the past or the future, gently guide the attention back. Allow yourself to be wholly immersed in the process of cooking.
6. As you continue to cook, bring awareness to any changes in your mood. Perhaps feelings of stress or anxiety emerge as you manage multiple things cooking at once.
7. Bring awareness to your mind. Observe any thoughts that are passing through and allow them to come and go as they will as best you can.
8. Continue with the cooking process in this mindful way until you have finished cooking and served up your meal.

### Part 2: Take your first bite

1. Once you have settled in your seat at the table, take a few moments to let go of the cooking process up until now and come into the present moment, sitting here, comfortable and relaxed.
2. Take your knife and fork and slice into your food to create your first bite. Bring your fork up towards your face for closer inspection. Imagine that you are looking at this piece of food for the first time as if you have never seen an object like this before. Notice the color... the shape ... any bumps or grooves ... Rotate your fork around and notice all the different features of the object.



3. Now, bring your fork up to your nose and notice the fragrances arising from the object ...
4. Gradually bring the object to your lips and notice what happens in your mouth and your body as you do this. The emergence of saliva ... a sense of anticipation ... perhaps a feeling of hunger. Notice your body preparing to eat.
5. Now, smile at your piece of food and, very slowly, take a bite ... Notice the feeling of your jaw opening as you do this ... and notice the feeling of your teeth piercing the object ... As you begin to chew, notice the tongue rolling around your mouth, knowing exactly what to do.
6. Resist the urge to swallow just yet ... and simply stay with the pleasurable experience of tasting this piece of food ... notice the complex flavors that arise ... notice if they change as you chew ... Take a moment to focus on appreciating and enjoying this moment thoroughly.
7. When you are ready, swallow what is in your mouth and notice any feelings and sensations that come with this ... satisfaction ... pleasure ... joy ... happiness ... relief ... Allow yourself to bask in this positive experience for as long as you like.
8. Now, as the meditation comes to an end, bring your awareness back to the room. Notice your seat beneath you ... your feet on the floor ... and take three deep, slow breaths.

### Debrief questions

- How do you feel right now?
- Is there a difference between how you feel now and how you typically feel after eating this type of food?
- What was it like to cook mindfully? How does this compare to your usual cooking experience?
- What was it like to revel in the experience of pleasure while eating?
- Did your mind wander during meditation? If so, where did it go? Were you able to bring your attention back to eating?
- If positive feelings arose during the exercise, where did these seem to be located within your body?