

# Mindful Eating Lesson Plan

(Grades 4 and up)

## Overview

Students will explore the concept of mindfulness and will have the opportunity to participate in a mindful eating activity.

Mindful eating can also be used during any eating opportunity, including lunchtime, snacks and any classroom lesson plan that involves food tasting. For lesson plans that use food, refer to our list of lesson plans: [bcdairy.ca/nutritioneducation/lesson-plans](http://bcdairy.ca/nutritioneducation/lesson-plans)

Estimated time: 40-50 minutes

Food costs: less than \$5



## Key Concepts

- Mindful eating is simply noticing how, what, where, when and why we eat.
- Practicing this skill helps us to understand the food choices we make, and in turn, how they make us feel.
- Mindful eating is a way to show the connection between food and physical, emotional and mental health.
- Over time, practicing mindful eating can help us to develop a healthy relationship with food, make choices that support our health, and show ourselves kindness and compassion.

## Materials

- Lesson Plan
- Mystery food can: instructions to make are found [here](#)
- Mystery food item: enough food to place inside the can and for the entire class to try at least 2 pieces. Examples include dried cranberries, apple chips and roasted chickpeas. Be sure to check for allergies or restrictions when selecting the food item.
- Napkins
- Mindful Eating Student Worksheet Master (Make enough copies to distribute one to each student)
- Teacher Background: “Mindful Eating”

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### Procedure

#### Learning Activity 1: Mystery Food Can

Place the mystery food in the can. Divide students into groups of 3-5. Guide the exploration by having one student at a time put a hand into the mystery food can and touch the food without looking inside. After each student within a group has touched the mystery food item, ask the group of students one question to help identify the food. Continue this procedure with the rest of the groups until all students have touched the mystery food item and each group has been asked one question to help identify the food.

Questions could be about the size, shape, texture, sound, temperature, etc. of the mystery food. Students could also be asked to guess the colour (inside and outside), flavour, or other properties of the food (e.g. Where does it grow: on a tree, a bush, or underground?)

After every group has had a turn, ask the students to identify the food. Remove it from the can for everyone to see.

Follow this activity with a brief discussion. Ask the class:

- a. What senses did you use to help identify the mystery food?
- b. Did you notice things you normally wouldn't have because you couldn't see the item? (smell and texture)
- c. What are the first things you usually notice about a food item? (appearance, color, smell, like/dislike)

#### Learning Activity 2: Principles of Mindfulness and Mindful Eating

A. Introduction:

Begin by asking the class:

- Has anyone ever heard of mindfulness? If so, what is it?
  - Mindfulness is noticing your thoughts, your feelings and your actions—not judging those thoughts, feelings or actions—but just being aware of your experiences in the present moment. With this awareness, over time, your thoughts, feelings and actions can change.
- Today we're going to explore how mindfulness can help us understand the food choices we make and how they make us feel.

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- Why try to eat mindfully?
  - Mindful eating can help us enjoy food more, understand our bodies better, and improve positive feelings about ourselves. Even one mindful bite can change our experience of a meal.

B. On the board, list or draw the 5 Senses for Mindful Eating with the help of the students (see below). Engage the class in a brief interactive discussion of how each sense plays a role in the process of mindful eating, connecting with the students' experiences with the mystery food.

### 5 Senses for Mindful Eating:

1. Look - colour, size, texture
2. Smell - provides the first clues to taste
3. Taste - flavour(s) – do they change over time?
4. Touch - texture, moisture, temperature
5. Listen - to the sounds made by the food (crispy, crunchy foods especially), but also to your body (are you hungry?)

C. Optional class debrief – Ask the class: Is this how you normally eat at lunch? Start to think about why or why not.

### Learning Activity 3: Mindful Eating Opportunity

Allow the students to put into practice what they have just learned.

Have everyone **wash their hands**, including the food handler. Pass out the mystery food item (2 pieces per student) on a napkin, and ask that no one eat the items before you begin the activity as a class.

Some students may not want to taste the food used for this activity. They can still practice using their senses to explore the food in a mindful way. Let students know it is their choice to eat—or not eat—the food item, and they can still participate in most of the activity.

First, have each student who would like to participate eat **one** piece of the food just as they normally would (non-mindfully).

For the **second** piece of food, take students through a mindful eating exercise using the following script:

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- *I'd like everyone to sit up in your chairs, with your back straight but not too stiff. Keep your feet planted firmly on the ground. Notice your breathing. Take a few deep breaths but stay relaxed.*
- *Look at the food in your hand. Without making a sound out loud, answer the following questions in your mind.*
  - *What do you notice? What shape is it? What colour is it?*
  - *Squeeze the food between your fingers. What sound does it make?*
  - *How does it feel in your hand? What is the texture like?*
- *Now, if you feel comfortable, please close your eyes.*
- *Hold the food up to your nose and smell it. What do you notice?*
- *If you'd like to, you can slowly put the food in your mouth, but don't chew on it. Let it sit on your tongue and notice how it feels.*
- *Slowly start to chew on the food. What is the flavour? Is there more than one flavour? How does it change as you chew it longer?*
- *What is the texture like now?*
- *Chew the food as many times as you can. Notice how the flavour and texture continue to change.*
- *If you'd like to, go ahead and swallow the food. Notice when you swallow it how it feels in your throat.*
- *Now you can open your eyes.*

Debrief by asking the students:

- What did you notice during this activity that you normally wouldn't have? (review five senses)
- Did you enjoy the food more the first time you ate it, or the second (during the mindful eating activity)? Why?
- How did taking time to slow down and notice the food make you feel?

Note: Acknowledge to the class that this exercise is very slow, so there is enough time to try practicing each step. When eating mindfully at a meal or snack, you would obviously need to eat faster to get enough food, but the goal is to notice our senses, thoughts, and overall experience of eating. **Even taking one mindful bite can change the experience of a meal.**

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### Learning Activity 4: Barriers to Mindful Eating

Divide the class into five groups. Give each group a Mindful Eating worksheet; assign one discussion question to each group. Students will reflect on their own experiences of meals and snacks at school and outside of school and will have about 5–7 minutes to share with their group and write them down. It is expected that each question will have multiple answers. Remind students to use their senses and the **5 W's** (who, what, when, where and why) when describing their experiences.

*Optional: For older students, or if time permitting, groups can answer all the questions. Give each group one question that they will be responsible to present to the class.*

1. Here at school, can you describe the eating environment at lunchtime? (e.g. Where do you eat? Is it a busy time? Do you take time to enjoy your food?)
2. What is your experience of other meals or snacks (not at school)? (e.g. Do you eat with others? Quickly or slowly? On the go?)
3. What are some of the reasons we don't eat mindfully? (no time, habits of eating quickly, distractions at meals)
4. How can we remind ourselves to eat mindfully at school? (deep breath before starting, make a sign on our desk, friend reminder, first bite is mindful)
5. How can we remind ourselves to eat mindfully outside of school? (share mindful eating with friend or family, reminder, turn off technology, give thanks before meals, make a poster)

Have each group share a few of their answers with the rest of the class. Invite students from the other groups to share ideas for each question as well.

### Learning Activity 5: Types of Hunger

To begin this activity in the classroom, draw a simple stick figure on the class whiteboard or a flip chart. As a group, briefly discuss the following questions:

- When do we eat? (when we are hungry, for growing/energy, certain times of day)
- Is being physically hungry the only reason to eat?

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### Types of Hunger:

- a. Belly Hunger (necessary hunger) → the body's cue that energy is needed
- b. Head/Mouth Hunger (appetite) → the body's cue that a food is appealing
- c. Heart Hunger (comfort eating) → eating due to feelings (about a food or in general), rather than belly hunger or head hunger

Ask the class:

- What are some examples of reasons why you might eat or drink?

At this point, begin to identify which type of hunger each reason for eating belongs to. Indicate this by writing each idea on the whiteboard and drawing an arrow to the corresponding area of the stick figure (head, heart, or belly).

Some ideas to get started:

| Belly Hunger                       | Head Hunger  | Heart Hunger                                     |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| growling stomach just before lunch | celebrations such as a birthday party with friends, or holiday with family | chicken noodle soup when feeling tired or unwell |
| dry mouth on a hot day/thirsty     | being offered a dessert that looks appealing after finishing a large meal  | eating after a bad day at school                 |
| feeling tired after a sports game  | smelling cookies   |  |

### Lesson Wrap-up

Ask students:

1. Why is it important to eat mindfully?
  - to slow down, enjoy the food, notice the food choices we make and how they make us feel, or notice what kind of hunger we feel
2. How can we remind ourselves to eat mindfully at school? Outside of school?
  - take a deep breath before beginning meals or snacks, removing distractions such as television or phones, asking a friend to eat mindfully together

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### Extension

1. Repeat the Mindful Eating Exercise (Learning Activity 3) with one or two other foods. Consider using two foods that differ from one another in flavour and texture (e.g. banana and roasted chickpeas). How are they different from one another? How are they similar? Be sure to check for any food allergies or restrictions before beginning this activity as a class.
2. Complete a guided meditation as a class. There are several free apps offering high quality pre-recorded meditations. (See Resources for more information.)
3. Mindful Eating “Yoga” Mat: [blogs.psychcentral.com/mindful-living/2015/02/yoga-mat-for-your-mouth](https://blogs.psychcentral.com/mindful-living/2015/02/yoga-mat-for-your-mouth). Allow each student to design their own personal “yoga mat” placemat for meals as a cue to eat mindfully.
4. Have the students each create a mindful eating journal of their own. See a great example that can be modified for various ages here: [blog.calm.com/relax/mindful-eating-journal](https://blog.calm.com/relax/mindful-eating-journal).
5. Assign students a mindful eating exercise to try at home. Have them complete a short journal reflection on the experience. Some prompts to consider are:
  - How was this meal different from others?
  - How did you feel before the meal or snack?
  - How did you feel after eating the meal or snack mindfully

### Teacher Backgrounder

#### What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness, in a general sense, is the act of being aware and focused on the present moment, and approaching this awareness with curiosity, non-judgement, and self-compassion. It can be used as a tool to observe wandering thoughts and gently refocus the mind. While it does have traditional roots in spirituality, present day mindfulness as a modern psychological concept is not directly associated with any specific spiritual or religious practice<sup>1</sup>.

#### How does mindfulness apply to eating behaviours?

*Mindful eating* is a term that applies the principles of mindfulness to food and the process of eating, by guiding the participant to:

- Use all of the senses to consciously select and enjoy foods that are both health-supporting and satiating

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- Acknowledge the physical and emotional response to specific foods (whether positive, negative or neutral) and the general experience of eating without judgement
- Develop the ability to identify physical hunger and satiety cues by focusing on internal cues, rather than external cues from the environment<sup>1</sup>

### **Mindful eating is not:**

- A weight loss strategy
- A quick way to start eating less
- A method to criticize food choices
- An unhealthy preoccupation with food

### **Why focus on mindful eating in the classroom?**

Research has shown a positive relationship between mindful eating and overall mental well-being<sup>2</sup> - an increasingly important priority for children and adults alike. The results from a recent study that took place in BC classrooms (grades 4-6) found that students who took part in a mindfulness-based program, which included a mindful eating component, had better social adjustment, academic performance, and stress management<sup>3</sup>. The positive benefits of mindful eating appear to carry over into other aspects of students' lives for enhanced overall well-being.

### **Here are some strategies that will help create a positive eating experience in the classroom:**

1. The more often you expose children to a food, the more inclined they are to like it.
2. Don't pressure or reward children for trying new foods. Research shows that children who are pressured or rewarded when trying a new food are less likely to go back to it than children who are simply exposed to the food and allowed to decide on their own whether or not to eat it.
3. Eating the food item is not essential for student learning in this lesson.



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### References

#### Links and Resources

Megrette Fletcher, Discover Mindful Eating for Kids: 75 Activities for Managing Picky Eaters, Overeaters, Speed Eaters and Every Kid In-Between. (Skelly Skills, 2015).

Laurie Grossman, Master of Mindfulness: How to Be Your Own Superhero in Times of Stress (Instant Help, 2016).

Calm App

A meditation app that offers a free subscription for K-12 teachers worldwide  
[calm.com/schools](https://calm.com/schools)

Headspace ® App

A meditation app offering sessions for a variety of themes, including sessions created specifically for mindful eating, and for children  
[headspace.com](https://headspace.com)

The Center for Mindful Eating

A non-profit organization providing information and resources on mindful eating  
[thecenterformindfuleating.org](https://thecenterformindfuleating.org)

Mindfulness in Schools

A non-profit organization providing mindfulness curricula and materials for schools  
[mindfulnessinschools.org](https://mindfulnessinschools.org)

Mindfulness for Teens

A BC-based website providing mindfulness information, tools, and resources for teens  
[mindfulnessforteens.com](https://mindfulnessforteens.com)

MindUP Program

A classroom-based mindfulness program for students ages 3 to 14  
[mindup.org/mindup/mindup-for-teachers](https://mindup.org/mindup/mindup-for-teachers)

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### More information for Teachers

#### Curriculum Links

- Grade 4–Grade 12: This lesson supports the Big Ideas Competencies, and Content in Physical and Health Education BC Curriculum, and can also link to other subject areas.

#### Want to do more nutrition education with your class?

Explore our other [lesson plans](#) or book a [free 1-hour workshop](#).

#### Related Lesson Plans

Apple Tasting (Gr.2-12):

[bcdairy.ca/uploads/bcdairy/Lessons/Apple\\_Tasting.pdf](http://bcdairy.ca/uploads/bcdairy/Lessons/Apple_Tasting.pdf)

Meals Then and Now (Gr.4-7):

[bcdairy.ca/uploads/bcdairy/Lessons/meals\\_then\\_and\\_now.pdf](http://bcdairy.ca/uploads/bcdairy/Lessons/meals_then_and_now.pdf)

So What's Normal: Health at Every Size (Gr. 6-9)

[bcdairy.ca/uploads/bcdairy/Lessons/So-whats-normal.pdf](http://bcdairy.ca/uploads/bcdairy/Lessons/So-whats-normal.pdf)

Do you think you are healthy? Exploring factors affecting food choices (Gr. 6-9)

[bcdairy.ca/uploads/bcdairy/Lessons/Do-you-think-youre-healthy.pdf](http://bcdairy.ca/uploads/bcdairy/Lessons/Do-you-think-youre-healthy.pdf)

#### References

1. Warren, J., Smith, N. and Ashwell, M. (2017). A structured literature review on the role of mindfulness, mindful eating and intuitive eating in changing eating behaviours: effectiveness and associated potential mechanisms. *Nutrition Research Reviews*, 30(02), pp.272-283.
2. Khan, Z. and Zadeh, Z. (2014). Mindful Eating and its Relationship with Mental Well-being. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 159, pp.69-73.
3. Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M. S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., Oberlander, T. F., & Diamond, A. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program for elementary school children: a randomized controlled trial. *Developmental psychology*, 51(1), 52-66.

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## Barriers to Mindful Eating

Instructions: In small groups, discuss the following questions. Remember to use the five senses and the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, why) in your answers. Share your group's answers during the class discussion.

1. Here at school, can you describe the eating environment at lunchtime? (e.g. Where do you eat? Is it a busy time? Do you enjoy your food?)
2. What is your experience of other meals or snacks (not at school)? (e.g. Do you eat with others? Quickly or slowly? On the go?)
3. What are some of the reasons we don't slow down to eat mindfully?
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