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Breaking WEIGHT BIAS

Promoting Health without harming through digital training tools

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6.2. Reconnect with food & Internal cues





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TRAINING CONTENT

6.2. Reconnect with food & Internal cues

6.2.1. Mindful eating

The term mindfulness, as described by Jon Kabat-Zinn, refers to “*paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgmentally*” (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). Accordingly, mindful eating invites the person to gain awareness of their eating experiences by paying attention to food, on purpose, moment by moment, with no judgement (Nelson, 2017).

There are several very important attitudes that are associated with mindful eating, including:

- non-judging,
- patience,
- beginner’s mind,
- trust,
- non-striving,
- acceptance, and
- letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 1991).

According to The Centre For Mindful Eating (n.d.), **mindful eating** is:

- *allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food selection and preparation by respecting your own inner wisdom,*
- *using all your senses in choosing to eat food that is both satisfying to you and nourishing to your body,*
- *acknowledging responses to food (likes, dislikes or neutral) without judgement,*
- *becoming aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decisions to begin and end eating.*

Someone who practices mindful eating can experience several benefits, including reconnection to their innate body wisdom, nourishment of heart and body, and awareness of health-supporting choices without diet-induced restriction that leads to feelings of deprivation (The Centre for Mindful Eating, n.d.).

Mindful eating has also been associated with:

- improved digestion through attenuated stress response (Cherpak, 2019),
- decreased binge eating and psychological distress in people with obesity (Dalen et al., 2010),
- improved glycemic control in adults with type 2 diabetes (Miller et al., 2012),
- reduced disordered eating behaviours in women (Beccia et al., 2020),
- enhanced eating behaviour during pregnancy (Hutchinson et al., 2017), and
- improvements in binge eating, emotional eating, and external eating (O'Reilly et al., 2014).



6.2.2. Intuitive eating

While mindful eating and intuitive eating are often used interchangeably, in fact there are two distinct protocols. As Evelyn Tribole explains, “*Intuitive eating is a broader philosophy*”, since it invites you to reject the diet mentality, challenge your dysfunctional beliefs around food, find pleasure in physical movement, and respect your body’s genetic blueprint. It is worth mentioning that eating mindfully is very helpful to become an intuitive eater and enjoy food (Mathieu 2009).

More specifically, intuitive eating is an evidence-based, dynamic process of integrating attunement of mind, body, and food, which helps people cultivate a healthy relationship with food and their bodies (Bas et al., 2017). It was created in 1995 by two dietitians, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, based on their work in eating disorder recovery. In introducing the concept of intuitive eating, Tribole and Resch argued that diet is detrimental to the psychological state, because failed attempts to lose weight decrease self-confidence.

Intuitive Eating is often described as a self-care eating framework, which leads to more satisfying eating experiences, self-compassion, improved wellbeing, and self-respect. It is a weight-neutral model with over 100 studies supporting its benefits for both physical and mental health. Intuitive eating comprises 10 Principles, which help people move away from the harmful diet mentality and its rigid rules, so they can reconnect with their inner body wisdom, and learn how to honour their needs, in a way that respects their body and mind (Tribole & Resch, 2020).

10 Principles of Intuitive Eating

1. Reject the Diet Mentality

This principle intends to make you realise in how many different ways dieting has affected your life both physically and psychologically. It invites you to reject all the lies and fake promises that diet culture tries to sell to you, and choose to get rid of the tools of dieting. This is a very crucial step to feel free and rediscover the connection with your body.

2. Honour Your Hunger

This principle helps you realise how important it is to respect your body needs without judgement, and feed your body with adequate energy and carbohydrates. Through practice, you learn how to become aware of your body cues, and honour your hunger accordingly, which is a key-step to healing your relationship with food.

3. Make Peace with Food

This principle can support you to feel peaceful around all foods, and recover from the deprivation effect that is caused by restriction. Giving yourself unconditional permission to



eat, and creating a safe environment to consume your “forbidden foods”, leads to habituation, which prevents you from losing control around those foods and overeating.



Figure 6.2. (a) : Dieting impedes habituation (Tribole & Resch, 2020).

4. Challenge the Food Police

This principle invites you to remove the concept of morality from food, which is a main source of shame and guilt that harms self-esteem. By challenging the food police, you learn how to become aware of all the distorted beliefs that you have internalised around food and body from diet culture or/and family, and start reframing them in a more compassionate, and supporting way, which has protective effects on your overall relationship with food.

5. Feel your Fullness

This principle helps you connect with your physical sensations from fullness and learn how to create the optimal eating environment (such as removing distractions etc.), in order to be able to eat until comfortably full.

6. Discover the Satisfaction Factor

This principle invites you to find pleasure in the eating experience, by honouring your true food preferences, and engaging in eating mindfully. Enjoying food and feeling satisfaction is related to increased psychological and biological health, and can help you connect with your comfortable fullness.

7. Cope with Your Emotions with Kindness



This principle helps you recognise that eating for emotional rather biological reasons is part of the human experience and often represents a coping mechanism for self-protection. Through practice, you become aware of your emotional triggers for eating, and gradually discover what you truly need, and how to cope with your feelings without turning to food.

8. Respect your Body

This principle invites you to accept body size and shape as it is meant to be by mother nature, and treat it with kindness and respect. You learn to honour your body as your precious home for your entire life, cultivate gratitude for everything that it daily offers to you, and change the way you talk about your body in a more positive and self-compassionate way.

9. Movement: Feel the Difference

This principle encourages you to start focusing on how you feel while moving your body, instead of approaching physical activity as an unpleasant obligation to burn calories. This shift can help the individual identify your personal benefits and motives for movement, and discover what kind of physical activities you truly enjoy, which is an important factor for achieving consistency in the long-term.

10. Honour Your Health - Gentle Nutrition

This principle invites you to make food choices that offer you pleasure, while making your body feel well. It helps you integrate the messages from your inner body wisdom with the health guidelines regarding nutrition and movement that come from legitimate sources, and achieve the so-called “Authentic Health”.

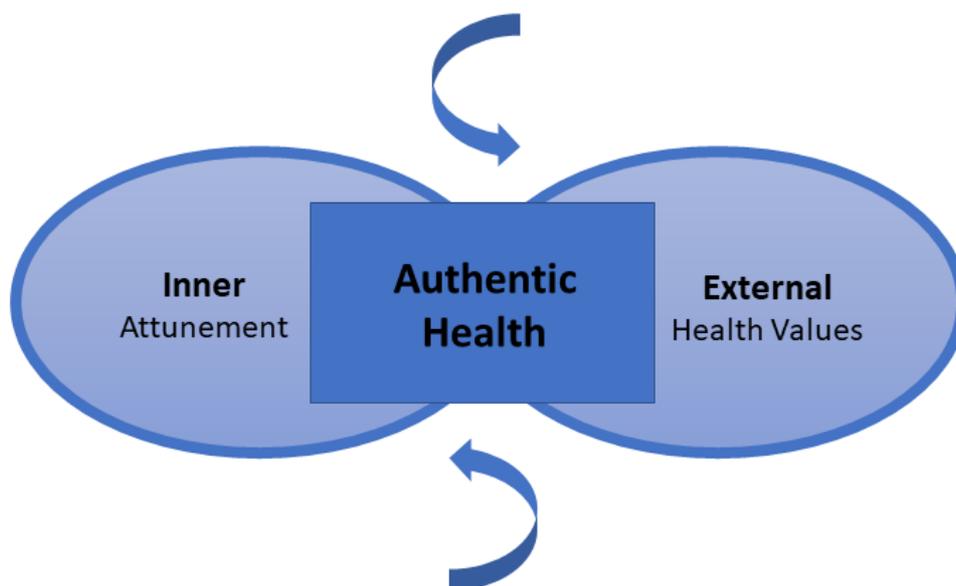


Figure 6.2. (b) : The Dynamic Integration of Inner Attunement & Health Values to Achieve Authentic Health (Tribole & Resch, 2020).

It is worth-emphasising that intuitive eating is not a ‘pass or fail test’, but a learning process that helps people cultivate compassion towards themselves. Intuitive eating generates



positive, sustainable outcomes over time and is a way to improve holistic health, including reduced weight-cycling, lower risk of eating disorders, better interoceptive awareness, psychological hardiness, and improved biomarkers, such as blood glucose and cholesterol (Tribole & Resch, 2020).

Moreover, according to a very recent meta-analysis by Linardon et al. (2021), which combined data from nearly 100 studies about intuitive eating, it has been found that **intuitive eating is positively associated with:**

- body appreciation,
- body image flexibility,
- body function,
- mindfulness,
- positive affect,
- self-compassion,
- self-esteem,
- social support,
- general wellbeing.



EXTERNAL RESOURCES

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