

the real dish

with *Lauren*
Lauren Moller-Seat, RDN



October 2021

Mindful Holiday *Magic*

WINTER IS COMING, which can bring on a lot of different feelings. Despite the holiday cheer, it can be a hard time for many people. One reason might be anxiety around what can feel like an endless array of treats and temptations. The good news is that you can learn to enjoy your celebrations and your favorite foods without the guilt. And now is the perfect time to start practicing.

Halloween is a great time to start working on your relationship with food. Many people feel a little out of control during this time, or have anxiety about their kids (or themselves) eating too much sugar. Starting to build a mindful eating practice can help you tune into your body and discover that when you give yourself permission to eat favorite foods, you may not want as much as you thought.

The temptation of “forbidden foods”

Part of the challenge around this time of year is that these celebratory foods feel like a limited time offer—“I’d better eat all the _____, because it’s only served at this time!” This scarcity mindset is a powerful tool for marketers (Looking at you, Pumpkin Spice Latte!)...They specifically advertise that it’s for a limited time only, so you feel rushed to get it while you can.

If you’re restricting yourself from enjoying Halloween candy or other special holiday foods,



you may be setting yourself up so that you feel scarcity. This kind of self-imposed restriction can backfire and cause binging because it feels like you’ll never get to have it again. This is known as the “last supper effect,” where you overcompensate and eat more than you might otherwise because it may be the “last time” you can enjoy it. Even if you’re just telling yourself that the diet starts tomorrow, it can cause intense cravings and make you feel like you better get it all in now.

Forbidden foods set up this false dichotomy that you either have to eat it all in a rush or you can never eat it again. Mindful eating can teach you to enjoy your favorite foods without feeling out of control. But it requires a little attention and some practice.



- Take the time to fully appreciate your treat. Was it satisfying? What would make it more satisfying? Do you need a few more? Did you take too much?

While you don't have to answer these questions every time you eat something, it can be a very helpful exercise to raise your awareness when eating. You might be surprised what you learn.

You can practice mindful eating during meals too. Take a moment at the beginning of your meal to center yourself, take a few deep breaths or say a prayer of gratitude. Then take a bite and really pay attention to the sensations. We're typically at our hungriest at the beginning of the meal, so that first bite is usually the most delicious. Pay attention to it.

About halfway through your meal, check in again, how's the meal? Where are you on the hunger/fullness scale? Does it still taste as good? Have you sampled everything on your plate? Is there anything you'd do differently?

At the end of the meal, check in again. How are you feeling? Did you eat enough? Too much? Did you enjoy it? Are you satisfied? What would make you more satisfied?

BE CURIOUS about these questions; there's no right or wrong answers.



Mindful eating can be especially helpful with holiday meals.

There can be a lot of things pulling at your attention, but

if you've practiced mindful eating you're better able to be present for it all. You've developed the skills to check in with yourself and realize you may not even be tasting your food because you're overwhelmed, eating quickly, upset, or distracted. You'll then have the skills to take a deep breath and try to re-center yourself.

Mindful eating in practice

To start off, think about what your favorite treats are. Do you love candy corn and it wouldn't be October without that sweet, sweet taste? Or do you eat candy corn because it's traditional and it's sitting in your office or house? If candy corn doesn't bring you joy, then don't bother with it. Save your enjoyment for the things that will really satisfy you and feel like a celebration.

Once you've established what your favorite treats are, set yourself up to really enjoy the experience when you eat them. Cut out distractions, take a few breaths to center yourself, use all of your senses to really pay attention to the experience. Before you begin, think about how much you think you need to be satisfied. Portion out that amount and put the rest away. (You can always come back for more.) Then try answering these questions:

Questions to ponder

- What does your treat smell like? What does it feel like, do you have to unwrap it?
- Have a bite, eat slowly, notice the textures on your tongue. Do you let your treat melt on your tongue or do you have to crunch it up? Do you like the temperature?



Share your favorite traditions with us on the [Barbara L. Posner Wellness & Support Center Facebook page](#).

Or you may realize that you're using food for comfort, and you can assess whether that's the best coping tool for you. Maybe you'd feel better if you did some journaling or went for a walk. Eating mindfully gives you those moments to check in and recognize what's really going on. It may take a while to learn what will help you feel your best, but once you've developed the practice, it can help you be more present in your eating—and in the rest of your life too.

and when you're in that primal hunger, you're more likely to overeat because your body is craving fast energy.

Plan your other meals around nutrient-dense foods that will leave you feeling satisfied and energized, such as fruits, vegetables, lean protein and whole grains. Something like a baked oatmeal can feel festive and feed a crowd.

Change the focus

Every family has their special traditions, and my family is all about our traditional holiday foods. But traditions can change and evolve too. I made a [Kale and Brussel Sprout Salad](#) a few years ago, and now it's requested at every holiday meal. It's the perfect balance of fresh and tart flavors. (It's even converted kale-haters who tried it at Friendsgiving!) So if you're hoping to balance out a few holiday meals, get festive with other foods like apples, pears, winter squashes, pomegranates, oranges, grapefruit, Brussel sprouts, and other seasonal produce.



The purpose of holidays

While it's common to think a lot about the food surrounding the holidays, don't forget all the other magic that can occur during this season. Develop traditions that don't have to revolve around food...How about a walk or drive to look at holiday decorations? What about

doing a craft project around the holiday? Have you journaled about what you're grateful for? Have you tried volunteering for cause you care about? What about a holiday movie? How about a trip to the pumpkin or Christmas tree farm?

Remember this long holiday season to prioritize the things that are really special to you. Practice mindfulness to really be present for the moments (and foods) that matter. Eat consistently throughout the day to feel your best. Create special traditions that don't have to revolve around food or drinks.

Editor's note: The information provided in this newsletter is for educational purposes only. Please speak with your health care team about your specific dietary and health needs.



Consistent eating is just as important during the holidays as the rest of the year.

DON'T FORGET to eat consistently throughout the day. Even if you're planning for a big feast, you still need energy throughout the day. Not eating regularly makes it harder to be mindful,