

FACT SHEET

MINDFUL EATING?



WHAT IS MINDFUL EATING?

To explain 'mindful eating', first we have to start with understanding 'mindfulness'. Mindfulness is deliberately shifting your attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental manner. Mindfulness is tuning into your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations you are having in this very moment. It is not about judging or reacting to any of these sensations, but about noticing them with curiosity.

Mindfulness is a well-researched practice. Just like training for sport, mindfulness is a practice that you can embed within your day. For example, take a moment to stop right now, take a deep breath in...and out. Now, try to hear and listen to your heartbeat. Your heart is beating all of the time, but it often goes unnoticed (except when those pre-competition nerves hit!)

Mindful eating is the specific application of mindfulness practice to eating. Mindful eating is bringing present moment awareness to the food and eating experience. Mindful eating works together with nutrition information. Both internal cues (such as the information received from inside your body e.g. hunger) and external cues (your nutrition and food knowledge e.g. what your accredited sports dietitian has taught you) can be used thoughtfully to navigate the type, amount and timing of nutrition that works best for you at the present time.

WHO SHOULD EAT MINDFULLY?

Great news! Mindful eating can be implemented for all active individuals; aspiring, current and former elite athletes from all sports.

Benefits of mindful eating can assist with:

- Fostering a healthy long-term relationship with your food and body.
 - Increasing awareness and understanding of body signals such as hunger and fullness.
- Decision making and when to action or override internal signals so your body is fuelled appropriately.
- Finding balance for fuelling for performance and eating for pleasure.
 - Increasing awareness and ability to self-regulate over-eating or under-fuelling.
 - Self-regulating recovery needs, through improved awareness of fuelling needs.

PRACTICING MINDFUL EATING:

As with any new skill, it can take time and practice. So it's a good idea to start small and work your way into it. Choosing one meal or snack in a day is a great start.

The following mindful eating activity uses an apple, but you may substitute any meal or food available.

1. Position: If you can, sit or stand somewhere you won't get disturbed.
2. Feel: starting with your mouth, describe to yourself what you feel. Is your mouth, dry, moist or salivating? Next your stomach, is it hungry? What does that feel like? What else do you notice?
3. Sight: take a look at the apple, pretend as if you are seeing it for the first time. What does it look like? Does it look vibrant, crispy, refreshing?
4. Smell: smell the apple, what does it smell like? Is it an appealing smell? Does the smell remind you of anything?
5. Touch: feel the apple, is the skin smooth or bumpy, cool or warm?
6. Taste: take a bite from the apple, don't chew yet. Take a moment to notice the flavours and feel of the apple in your mouth. Does the flavour change as it sits there?
7. Chew and swallow: begin to chew, notice the crunch and flavour. When you are ready, swallow, and feel the piece of apple move through your body.

The above process is an example that briefly demonstrates the awareness you can develop during a mindful eating experience.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE:

Mindful eating:

- Is bringing non-judgmental awareness to the present moment specific to food and the eating experience.
- Can increase awareness of internal cues, e.g. hunger.
- Can assist adequate fuelling and hydration

An Accredited Practicing Sports Dietitian trained in mindful eating can assist you in implementing mindful eating into your life.