A Brief Mindful Eating Weight Loss Program: Patient Handouts

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Session 1- Hunger and Fullness

*Learning to listen to your body’s natural hunger and fullness cues is an important step towards successful weight loss.* When we ignore or are unaware of these natural cues, we tend to eat more than we need. By learning to tune in and to listen to our body’s natural hunger and fullness signals, we can eat less and lose weight.

**Homework:** To help you start tuning into your body’s natural hunger and fullness cues, we will practice a belly scan exercise. **This exercise will help you to start turning your attention inwards, that is, towards your belly and its many sensations.** By practicing this exercise every day, you will become more aware of your natural stomach signals, which will make it easier for you to recognize when to eat, when not to eat, and when to stop eating before eating too much.

**Belly Scan Exercise**

This belly scan should take **2 minutes** to complete. When practicing this scan, set an alarm to help you keep track of the time. If at any point during this exercise you find yourself distracted, or lost in thought, gently bring your attention back to your belly and its many sensations.

Please read the following instructions before attempting the belly scan.

1) Sit.
2) Close your eyes and take three deep breaths.
3) When you are relaxed, turn your attention towards your belly.
4) How does it feel? What sensations do you notice? Pay close attention to these feelings and sensations.
   - Is it empty, hallow, hungry?
   - Is it full, bloated, uncomfortable?
   - Is it tense, tight?
   - Is it neutral, happy, content?

When it has been 2 minutes, open your eyes. Make note of what you felt in the table on page 2.

**Whenever you are about to eat, or have an urge to eat, mentally scan your stomach.** When you perform this scan, you do not need to close your eyes. Just focus your attention on your stomach. How does it feel? What sensations do you notice? **This mental belly scan will help you eat less by making you aware of how your belly feels when it is hungry or full.**
**Belly Scan Exercise: Tracking Sheet**

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<tr>
<th>Date/time</th>
<th>How did your stomach feel? What sensations did you notice?</th>
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<td>(Was it tense, tight, uncomfortable, bloated, empty, hungry, happy, or content?)</td>
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Session 2 - Mindful Eating

Mindful eating will help you become more aware of your body’s natural fullness cues (i.e. when you have consumed enough food and should stop eating), which will help you eat less and lose weight.

Homework 1: Practice mindful eating at home: Mindfully choose what to eat: Eat non-greasy, low sugar foods. Do not eat when you are distracted (e.g., watching television, working on the computer, etc.). When you are eating, slow down and eat with all of your senses. Pay close attention to the smell, taste, and texture of your food. Use the belly scan to stay in-tune with your stomach cues. How does your stomach enjoy its food? Is the sugar, fat and calorie content of the food worth its pleasure? Mindful eating will help you eat less because you will have the time to weigh the pros and cons of what you are eating.

Whenever you eat a high calorie food, ask yourself whether or not it is worth it. Does the pleasure you receive from eating this food warrant its calories, sugar, or fat intake? Most of the time, it does not. When we become fully aware of what we are eating, especially when eating “bad” foods, we tend to enjoy these foods less, or even dislike them.

Homework 2: To help you slow down and eat less, I want you to use an exercise called: Stop-Bite-Breath: That is, before eating a meal or snack, take a moment to Stop: Examine your food; what does it look like? What does it smell like? Is this food a non-greasy, low sugar, low fat food? Then, take a Bite: Pay close attention to the food’s taste and texture. Finally, after swallowing your mouthful of food, take one deep Breath and savor the experience. Make sure to scan your belly between breaths. Pay close attention to your stomach cues. How does your stomach feel after every bite? Is it becoming less hungry and more full? Continue this sequence of stopping-biting-and breathing until you are done eating. Make sure to stop eating when you feel full, even if your meal or snack is not completely finished.

Fill in the following chart to reflect on your mindful eating experience using Stop-Bite-Breath.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>What did I eat?</th>
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Please answer the following questions.

1) How did mindful eating differ from mindless eating?

2) How did the taste and pleasure of your food warrant its calories, or not?

3) When you mindfully ate your favorite “bad” foods (e.g. chips, chocolate, crackers, etc.) how did they taste? Did they taste better or worse than before?
Session 3 – Emotional Eating

If you realize why you have the urge to eat and choose to eat only when you are physically hungry, you will eat less and you will lose weight.

Homework: Use STOP to help reduce emotional eating. If you are not an emotional eater, use STOP whenever you experience an urge to eat. When you use STOP, please go through the checklist in this handout and make sure that you are using all four steps correctly (Stop, Take a breath, Observe, and Proceed).

STOP stands for:
- ✤ S – Stop! Do not immediately act on your urge to eat.
- ✤ T – Take a breath—Slow down!
- ✤ O - Observe—Look inwards. Do a belly scan. How are you feeling? Is this urge to eat physical or emotional? Are you perhaps feeling bored, tense, or sad?
- ✤ P – Proceed. Decide to eat or not to eat based on your observations. If you are physically hungry, eat (but be mindful about what you eat and eat it slowly). If you are emotionally hungry, do not eat; instead, take the time to really understand your emotions. Ask yourself what you are feeling and why?

When you use STOP, please go through the checklist and make sure that you are using all four steps correctly (Stop, Take a breath, Observe, and Proceed).

My STOP Checklist:

1) Did I STOP?
   - Yes
   - No
2) Did I TAKE A BREATH?
   - Yes
   - No
3) Did I OBSERVE and listen to my body? How do I feel? Am I physically or emotionally hungry?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I feel…
   - Am I physically or emotionally hungry?…
4) Did I PROCEED? (What did I decide?)
   - I chose to eat
   - I chose not to eat
Please answer the following questions.

1) How useful did you find STOP in reducing your urges to eat?

________________________________________________________________________

2) Did STOP help you slow down enough to figure out whether your urges to eat were emotional or physical (i.e. true hunger)?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
## Session 4 – Identifying Hunger Cues

In order to lose weight, it is important that you learn to recognize and distinguish true hunger from psychological hunger, and to eat only when you are truly hungry.

**Homework:** This week, I want you to practice to **only eat when you are physically hungry.** Every time you have an urge to eat, use your belly scan and the STOP technique to rate your level of hunger on a scale from 1 (starving; feeling weak, dizzy) to 10 (stuffed; so full you feel sick). **Postpone eating if your fullness score is 4 or higher.**

Use the following scale to track your level of hunger on page 2.

### Hunger and Fullness Scale

1. **Starving** – Urgent and unbearable feeling of extreme hunger, “I want to eat everything in sight.”  
   *Physical sensations:* Severe hunger pangs, feeling extremely irritable, shaky, lightheaded, weak.
2. **Extreme hunger** – Feeling overly hungry but the feeling is still bearable.  
   *Physical sensations:* Cranky, low energy, a lot of stomach growling, hunger pangs, difficulty concentrating.
3. **Rather hungry** – I am hungry, “I want to eat now, but am still in control of my hunger.”  
   *Physical sensations:* Slight hunger pangs, mild stomach growling and/or discomfort.

   **** If your fullness is 4 or higher, postpone eating ****

4. **Peckish** – I am starting to feel a little bit hungry, “I will want to eat soon, but not now.”  
   *Physical sensations:* Very mild sensations of gnawing, churning or growling in stomach.
5. **Neutral** – I am neither hungry nor full.  
   *Physical sensations:* No sensations. Stomach feels neutral. It is at rest.
6. **Nearly satisfied** – Starting to feel content, but could eat a couple more bits before feeling comfortably satisfied.  
   *Physical sensations:* A gentle pressure or sensation is beginning to build.
7. **Comfortably satisfied** – I have eaten enough. I could continue to eat, but I am no longer physically hungry. **** This is where you should stop eating ****  
   *Physical sensations:* A gentle pressure or sensation is felt, usually at the upper or top part of the stomach. Stomach is satisfied. Hunger pangs have disappeared.
8. **Slightly too full** – I have eaten a bit too much, “I probably should have stopped eating a couple of bits ago”  
   *Physical sensations:* A slightly uncomfortable feeling or pressure in your stomach. You may feel the slight pressure of your stomach against your clothes, especially the waist of your pants.
9. **Stuffed (overfull)** – I have eaten way too much. I am overfull, “Why did I eat that much?”  
   *Physical sensations:* Physically uncomfortable, stomach feels bloated or inflated; clothes feel tight and uncomfortable around stomach region.
10. **So full you feel sick** – I am beyond stuffed.  
    *Physical sensations:* Feelings of physical illness, or nausea; extreme discomfort. No energy, lethargic.
### Tracking My Level of Hunger and Urges to Eat

| Date/Time | Did I scan my belly using STOP? (yes/no) | What is my current level of hunger?  
1 (starving; weak; dizzy) to 10 (stuffed; so full I feel sick)  
*If your fullness score is 4 or higher, postpone eating* |
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Session 5 – Identifying Fullness Cues

When your stomach is truly satisfied, a light, almost gentle pressure will appear in your abdomen.

**Homework 1:** This week, I want you to practice recognizing and identifying the feelings in your stomach when you eat and after you eat. Before taking a bite of food, rank your hunger or fullness on a scale from 1 (starving) to 10 (so full you feel sick). Use the hunger and fullness scale we reviewed last session. **Make sure to stop eating when you feel comfortably satisfied (scale point 7).**

**Homework 2:** As you eat, use the belly scan to help you recognize and identify when you are feeling comfortably satisfied. Pay special attention to how your stomach feels after every bite of food. Notice how the empty sensation in your stomach is slowly replaced by a gentle pressure. Remember to **stop eating once you feel this gentle pressure, even if food is still left on your plate.** When practicing identifying these fullness cues, use STOP. This exercise will help slow you down between bites, making it easier to recognize when you should stop eating.

**IMPORTANT:** Please use the following frequency chart to record how often you used the belly scan and the hunger/fullness scale to help you recognize when feeling “comfortably satisfied.” Check-off the appropriate box after using either of the two techniques.

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Session 6 – Mindful Awareness of Food Choices and Portion Sizes

**Homework:** This week, I want you to become mindfully aware of your portion sizes. **Eating smaller portions is crucial for weight loss.** To help you get started, use the three tips reviewed in session (e.g. using a smaller plate, limit your carb intake, and choosing to eat a low-calorie soup or salad before your main course). To help you remember, use the check list provided below.

TODAY, did I decrease my portion sizes by…

1) **Using a smaller plate**
   - Yes
   - No

2) **Moderating my carbohydrates**
   (e.g. Trading my breakfast, lunch and dinner carbs with a high protein alternative, doubling up on my vegetables, eating only ½ cup of low carb pasta, like egg noodles, and avoiding sugary drinks, etc.)
   - Yes
   - No

3) **Eating a low calorie soup or salad before my meal**
   (Note: The soup must be broth-based and avoid using any cream-based salad dressings)
   - Yes
   - No

Please answer the following questions.

1) Which technique(s) did you find most helpful? Why?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2) How (else) will you decrease your portion sizes in the future?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Session 7 - Mindful Awareness of Meal Frequency

Rather than eating 2 or 3 large meals per day, reduce these meals into 4 or 5 smaller portions. By spreading your meals throughout the day, you will improve your metabolism, you will be more in control and will be less likely to overeat due to extreme hunger.

**Homework:** This week I want you to increase your mindful awareness of your daily meal frequency. **Aim to eat 3 small meals and 2 snacks** each day. Whenever you eat a small meal or snack, please check off the appropriate box below.

### My Weekly Meal Frequency Chart

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Please answer the following questions.

1) How did changing your meal frequency affect your hunger?

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

2) When you felt that you were hungry or not satisfied, how did you deal with it?

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________
Session 8 – Establishing Habits

All of the homework that has been given up to this point will be most effective if it is practiced regularly so that it becomes a habit. The skills that you have learned here can be used indefinitely. **There is no quick fix, or easy solution to weight loss.** Because weight loss takes time and effort, it is important that you focus on applying these skills consistently over the long term. This way, these skills will continue to help you eat less and lose weight.

**Homework:** Every session, we discussed a specific technique or exercise to help you start tuning in and listening to your body’s physical cues of hunger and fullness. Below is a list of these techniques.

1. Belly scan exercise
2. STOP (Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed)
3. Stop-Bite-Breath; helps slow your eating down
4. Rating your hunger and fullness cues
5. Belly scan while eating
6. Tracking your portion sizes
7. Tracking your meal frequency

Please answer the following questions.

1) Which of these have helped you the most in reducing your tendency to overeat?

2) How will you combine them to further lose weight?
Session 9 – Commitment to Values

Setbacks and loss of motivation are normal. They happen to everyone and are an inevitable part of weight loss. In a way, weight loss is like hiking a mountain. For a while, it feels like the hike is never going to end and there is no way that you will make it to the top. But once you get out of the trees, you can see a clear path to the summit and know that you are going in the right direction. Success is not only about the final outcome (in this case, making it to the top of the mountain). You can also achieve success along the way. It’s like the old saying, “it’s not about the destination, it’s about the journey.” Weight loss won’t always be easy, or smooth, but that doesn’t mean that one cannot achieve one’s eventual goal if one set one’s mind to it.

Losing weight is about progress and not perfection. Immediate results do not exist. True weight loss takes time and effort. In order to stay motivated and on the right track, it is important that you identify and celebrate every bit of progress that you have made thus far. When you catch yourself being critical or judgmental towards yourself, always remember that changing old habits and losing weight is a process. It doesn’t happen overnight. Dwelling on negative thoughts only hinders this process (e.g. “I cheated”, “I’m a pig”, “I’m such a failure”). Instead, focus on the positives (e.g. “I stopped eating when I felt comfortably satisfied,” “I only ate when I was truly hungry,” “I didn’t eat that cupcake that my colleague offered me at lunch”). Remember, no one is ever perfect, so every bit of progress is a step in the right direction!

Homework (done in-session): Make a summary card.

Summary Card
My Weight Loss Goals and Values: Why is Losing Weight so Important to me?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.

When you are feeling a lack of motivation, or have experienced a setback, always refer back to this card. This summary card will help you stay on track by reminding you why you want to lose weight, and why overeating is inconsistent with your weight loss values. Throughout the program, you have learnt skills to help you stick to your values of eating less to lose weight. In order to stay true to these values, you can use the techniques that you chose as being most effective in managing your tendency to overeat. Keep this card where you can see it, so that it acts as a constant reminder of your values to reduce your overeating and to lose weight. When a setback occurs, refer back to this summary card and use it as a source of motivation to keep heading towards your values of losing weight and eating less.