

## 4.4 Breathe Before Eating

Become present prior to meals to increase your agency around food.

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This tool, along with the following five (Tools 4.4 to 4.9), all focus on your relationship with food and nutrition. Each one takes a different angle, from choosing sustainable dieting practices to thinking carefully about what foods you keep in the house to allowing yourself to be hungry at times without immediately succumbing to the desire to eat. The third angle is the most fundamental.

At times, we all eat without thinking. You may be at a large event with an overabundance of food, so you eat without stopping to check whether you're actually hungry and whether you want to put the particular foods on offer inside your body. At other times, you may eat when you're bored, sad, or stressed in an unconscious effort to distract yourself from those difficult emotions. These knee-jerk reactions can undermine your relationship with food. If you're dieting, they may prevent you from making progress. Even if they're not, they may spoil your enjoyment and your health.

Finding ways to limit this type of mindless eating can be very beneficial, and taking a few deep breaths before making the decision to put something in your mouth is a valuable first step.

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- Gain greater awareness and decision-making skills about your eating habits.
- Helps you remain on course with your diet or weight goals.

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- The conditioned urge to eat whatever is available can be strong and hard to overcome.
- In social situations, taking the time to breathe for a few seconds can feel awkward.

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Wherever you are, whenever you are about to eat something, take a moment to stop and become present. Whether you're out at a party, about to tuck into a favorite meal at home, or standing in front of a vending machine on your work break, the principle is the same. Stop, breathe, and check in with your mental and physical state.

Take a few deep breaths and investigate the sensations in your mind and body. Are you really hungry? Or are you about to eat due to habit, boredom, or social pressure? Will the food you're about to eat satisfy your hunger, or will it just distract you from your immediate circumstances?

Take enough time to allow a truthful answer to emerge. Then, if you determine that the food will meet your needs, allow yourself to eat. Otherwise, if you're not hungry, and you realize the food you're contemplating will not fulfill any need, you can choose to support your higher goals and restrain yourself.

To make it easier to resist temptation, it can be useful to prime yourself with a few other options. Carry healthy snacks with you so you feel less pressure to eat whatever is available. Get into the

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habit of drinking plenty of water, which can quench both your thirst and feelings of hunger. Distract yourself from the desire to eat by doing something else, such as going for a walk. You can also practice mindfulness, mentally acknowledging your hunger whenever you feel it. These steps can help you feel more in control of your choices.

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