

Savor – Thich Nhat Hanh

Intro

Dealing with our overweight – or with any of our life’s difficulties, for that matter — is not a battle to be fought. Instead, we must learn how to make friends with our hardships and challenges. They are there to help us; they are natural opportunities for deeper understanding and transformation, bringing us more joy and peace as we learn to work with them.

## Chapter 1: Ending Your Struggle with Weight

The Buddha teaches that change requires insight, and insight cannot begin until we stop and focus our attention on what is happening right in front of us. This stopping, or *shamatha*, allows us to rest the body and the mind. When we have calmed ourselves, we can then go on to look deeply into our current situation. We need to step off or frantic life treadmills, to stop unconsciously doing the same things over and over again that have allowed our weight creep up. We need to stop, rest, and reflect on a constructive way forward that will in the habits that have led to her current weight issues. We need to be fully aware of what is going on in our daily living. Only then can we begin to change.

There is a Zen story about a man and a horse. The horses galloping quickly, and it appears that the rider is urgently heading somewhere important. A bystander along the road calls out “Where are you going?” and the rider replies, “I don’t know. Ask the horse”. The horse is our “habit energy,” the relentless force of habit that pulls us along, that we are often unaware of and feel powerless to change. We are always running.

How can we stop the state of turmoil? How can we stop our fear, our despair, our anger, and our cravings? We have to learn to become solid and stable like an oak tree, and not be blown from side to side by the emotional storm. We have to learn the art of stopping— stopping our running so that we can be present for and embrace our habit energies of worry, blame, guilt, and fear, and calm the strong emotions that dictate us. We have to learn to live fully in the present moment. We need to practice breathing in and breathing out with all our awareness. We have to learn to become mindful.

When we are mindful, touching deeply the present moment, in the here and now, we gain more understanding, more acceptance, more forgiveness and love of self and others; our aspiration to relieve suffering grows; and we have more chances to touch joy and peace.

We need the energy of mindfulness to recognize and be present with our habit energy so that we may be prevented from dominating us. It’s often destructive course. Mindfulness allows us to acknowledge our habit energy every time it pops up: “Hello, my habit energy. I know you are there.” If you just mindfully smile to your habit energy, it will lose much of its strength. The chips stay in the freezer, not the ice cream in the freezer. The storm passes by, and we watch, breathing in and breathing out all the while.

After we become calmer, we can recognize our weight problem more clearly and acknowledge it instead of denying it. This may not be easy for you to do. You may feel angry, frustrated, or fed up about your weight. Do not suppress these feelings of anger. Instead, as the Buddha has taught us, accept and embrace these difficult feelings, like a mother cradling her crying baby. The crying baby needs the mother’s loving care. In a similar manner, your negative emotions and turmoil are crying out loud, trying to get your attention. Your negative emotions also need your tender, loving care. By embracing your negative feelings whenever they arise, you can prevent yourself from being swept away by your emotional storm, and you can calm yourself. When you are calmer, you’re more able to see that you already have within yourself the power and the tools to begin to change.

Stopping, calming, and resting our preconditions for healing. If we cannot stop, we will continue on the course of destruction caused by unmindful consumption.

## The Four Noble Truths of Healthy Weight

The Buddha offered many teachings to help people in their suffering, the first and most important been the Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth is that all of us have suffering in our lives. None of us can escape it. The Second Noble Truth is that we can identify the causes of our suffering. The Third Noble Truth is that we can put an end to our suffering and that healing is possible. Finally, the fourth Noble truth is that there are past to free us from suffering. We can cultivate our well-being by concretely applying mindfulness to our daily living.

To be successful, it is very important for you to believe that you can achieve a healthy weight. Believing in yourself, having the faith that you can change the habits that do not serve you well, and adopting science-based wisdom are important for successful transformation of our behavior. According to the psychologist Albert Bandura, ‘perceived self-efficacy’ is essential for any behavior change. Self-efficacy is simply the belief that one can carry out a behavior necessary to produce adopted desired outcome. What we believe can significantly affect what we can achieve. People who believe that they can reach a healthier weight through healthy eating and active living set relevant goals that they perceive to be important for the desired change. They believe that those goals are attainable, and they believe that they have the ability to carry them out.

What are your current beliefs? Are they real or are they shattered with solutions from your past experiences, failures, and disappointments? The past is the past. The past is your teacher and can offer valuable lessons on what worked and what did not work for you. But it is not your present reality. Every major present reality only if you allow it to be. Do not let past experiences hold you back. Your failures do not need to determine your current or future experience. Focus on the present. When you focus on the present, and you did not give any power to your past actions.

#### Chapter 4: Stop and Look: The Present Moment

To understand and transform our suffering, we need to use the step-by-step process of deep observation – just like the scientist is in the laboratory. We start by being aware of and acknowledging our suffering. Take, for example, our unhappiness with our weight. We must make an effort to stop our busy lives for a moment and become aware of our suffering– something most of us try to avoid and resist. Instead, we need to embrace and accept the pain we feel about our weight. Next, we must realize that the suffering inside us isn’t just something we are looking up from the outside: we are that block of suffering. We become one with our suffering, just as a scientific observer becomes one with the objects of his investigation, and this amalgam is the key to transforming and relieving our misery.

#### Chapter 5: mindful eating

Looking deeply at the food we eat, that we see that it contains the earth, the air, the rain, sunshine, and the hard work of farmers and all those who process, transport, and sell us the food. When we eat with full awareness, we become increasingly mindful of all the elements and effort needed to make our meals a reality.

Now that we’ve covered the basics of healthy eating, let’s focus on how to eat mindfully so that we truly enjoy our food and eat with compassion and understanding. Mindful eating means simply eating or drinking while being aware of each bite or sip. You can practice it at any meal, whether you are alone your kitchen or with others in a crowded restaurant. You can even practice mindful drinking when you pause to take a sip of water at your desk. Mindful eating allows us to fully appreciate the sensory delight of eating and to be more conscious of the amount and nature of all that we eat and drink. When practice to its fullest, mindful eating turns a simple meal into a spiritual experience, giving us a deeper appreciation of all that went into the meal’s creation as well a deep understanding of the relationship between the food on the table, our own health, our planet’s health.

#### The Seven Practices of a Mindful Eater

One way to incorporate mindfulness into your meals is to simply use the breath. Before eating, make a practice of pausing. Brief in and out a few times so that you can be one with the food you are about to eat. Mindful eating takes dedicated practice, and there’re seven practices that you can develop to help you eat mindfully for good health.

- **HONOR THE FOOD.** Start the meal was five contemplations, or with whatever traditional grace for prayer you prefer to use to express your gratitude. If you are eating with others, steer mealtime conversations toward the food: acknowledge the local farmer who grew your lettuce and tomatoes. Thank the person who prepared the salad; or talk about other topics that help nurture gratitude and connection to your food and each other. Refrain from hashing overworked or the latest atrocities is in the news. Refrain from arguing. This can help you make sure that you are chewing only your food, not your frustrations. In Vietnam it is accustom to never chastise anyone while they’re eating, so as not to disturb their eating or digestion.
- **Engage all six senses.** As you serve and eat your meal, notice the sounds colors smells and textures, as well

as your mind's response to them, not just the taste. When you put the first bite of food in your mouth, pause briefly before chewing and notice its taste as though it was the first time you'd ever tasted it. With more practice engaging all of your senses, you may notice that your tastes change, increasing your enjoyment of what you may once have perceived as boring health foods.

- Serve in modest portions. Moderation is an essential component of mindful eating. Not only does making a conscious effort to smaller portions help you avoid overeating and weight gain; it is also less wasteful of your household budget and our planet's resources. Using a small dinner plate, no larger than 9 inches across, and filling it only once can help you eat more moderately.
- Savor Small bites, and chew thoroughly. Consciously choosing smaller bites and chewing them well can help you slow down your meal as well as allow you to fully experience the taste of your food. It can also help improve your digestion, since the process of breaking down their food begins with enzymes in the mouth. Chew each bite into the food is liquefied in your mouth; that maybe 20 to 40 times, depending on what you're eating. Chewing well allows your tongue and palate to taste the food better. Once you have swallowed this bite, you will still be able to savor the wonderful taste that the food offers
- eat slowly to avoid overeating. Eating slowly may help you notice when you're feeling pleasantly satisfied so that you can stop before you have eaten too much. There's a difference between feeling that you've had just about enough to eat and feeling as though you have been all that you can possibly eat. My full leaders practice the former so that they are not overtaxing their bodies, or overtaxing the planet's resources, by consuming more food than they need. And Chinese medicine, it is recommended that to eat only until you're 80% full and never "to top off your tummy", this weakens the digestive power of your stomach and intestines, putting too much stress on them over the long haul. There is ongoing scientific research on the effects of caloric restriction on longevity, though the results are far from conclusive in humans. Of course, avoiding overeating is half of the secret to weight control. (getting enough activity is the other half and we discuss this more in chapter 6.) one way to slow down is to consciously put your eating utensils down in between bites. Be aware of your body as you eat. When we eat mindfully, we are relaxed and calm. There is no rush to attend other tasks; there is no hurry. There is only the present moment. To help you practice this, make sure to allow enough time to enjoy the meal. If your mealtime is short, for example during your lunch break at work, plan on the smaller meal rather than cramming down a large meal quickly.
- Don't skip meals. Skipping meals can make it harder to make mindful choices. When hunger consumes us, the strong forces of habit energy may lead us to grab whatever foods are close at hand, be they from a vending machine or fast food restaurant, and these foods may not further our healthy eating and weight loss goals. So called grazing – moving from one food to another, a few bites of this, a few bites of that, without ever sitting down to regular meal – can also work against your healthy weight goals, because you may consume more food than you realize without ever feeling truly satisfied. So give yourself the opportunity to make mindful choices throughout the day; plan regular meals and, if it suits you, healthy snacks in between. It is also good to eat your meals of the same time each day, to help your body settle into a consistent rhythm. And give yourself enough time to fully savor your food so that you were aware of all the sensory delight your meals have to offer.
- Eat a plant-based diet, for your health and for the planet. When my mindful eaters look deeply at the meal they're about to eat, they see far beyond the rim of the plate. This is the dangers told that eating some types of animal food can take on their bodies– The high risk of colon cancer from red meat and processed meats, for example, with a higher risk of heart disease saturated fats found in meat and dairy products. And they see the equally dangerous and destructive told that meat production in dairy farming take our environment. Researchers at the university of Chicago estimate that, when it's all added up, the average American could do more to reduce global warming emissions by going vegetarian and by switching from a Camry to a Prius. Even just switching from red meat and dairy to poultry or eggs for one day a week could have a measurable impact on global warming – and a bigger environmental impact than choosing locally sourced foods.

It has become common advice for dieters: "eat slowly and chew your food well." And it certainly makes intuitive sense. The theory, popularized nearly 40 years ago, is that it takes 20 minutes for our brains to register a that our stomachs are full, and that when we eat too quickly, we speed through the physical and hormonal stop signs and

overeat. Eating more slowly may also give us more pleasure from her food as we take time to savor every bite.

## Chapter 7: MINDFUL LIVING PLAN

We need to learn the art of listening and speaking. To help restore communication, we need deep, compassionate listening to help us understand others better. This means that our only intention while listening is to help the other person suffer less and express what she has in her heart. We become completely present to just receive what she needs to share, without judging or reacting. Even if the other person says things that are not true, that contain a lot of blaming bitterness, we do not correct her straightaway. We give her space to share her feelings, and later on, maybe a day or two later, we can slowly share information that will help her release the wrong perception's about us or the situation.

If you're interested in connecting with others who practice mindfulness, there are hundreds of local sanghas all over the world. At [www.iamhome.org](http://www.iamhome.org) you can find a worldwide list of sanghas in the Thich Nhat Hanh tradition.

### Appendix A: integrating mindfulness into your daily life

Mindfulness practice centers in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh - New York  
[www.bluecliffmonastery.org](http://www.bluecliffmonastery.org)

Deer Park Monastery - California  
[www.deerparkmonastery.org](http://www.deerparkmonastery.org)

European Institute of applied Buddhism - Germany  
[www.eiab.eu](http://www.eiab.eu)

Maison de L'Inspir – France  
[www.maisondelinspir.over-blog.com](http://www.maisondelinspir.over-blog.com)

Plum Village – France  
[www.plumvillage.org](http://www.plumvillage.org)

Sangha Directories  
[www.iamhome.org](http://www.iamhome.org)

mindfulness clock  
[www.mindfulnessdc.org](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org)

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