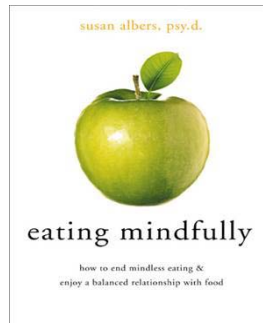


Welcome to the Eating Mindfully Book Club & Discussion Guide

This guide coincides with information in:



By: Susan Albers PsyD

ABOUT THE BOOK: Eating Mindfully's question and discussion guide is intended to help readers think deeply about their mindful and mindless eating habits. This book is a useful adjunct to therapy, yoga, work with a nutritionist, meditation, support groups for yo-yo dieters, book clubs and group discussions. An upbeat, realistic and compassionate book about mindful eating—a nondiet approach. Over 45 mindfulness Eastern/Meditation practices.

SUMMARY: Any problem with food, whether eating too little, overeating, or chaotic eating, can be improved through the practice of mindfulness. This is a gentle book with 46 techniques for becoming more mindful of how, what, where and why you are eating. Integrates Buddhist methods of meditation with cognitive behavioral skills.

REVIEW: *"The practice of mindful eating is like going on an archeological dig through layers of symptoms to the truth underneath. Albers has given us an excellent map! Her book makes clear that problem eating can be a great teacher if only we stop to listen. I highly recommend this gentle, respectful, practical guide."* - **Lindsey Hall Cohn** Author of *Self Esteem: Tools for Recovery, Full Lives: Women who Have Freed Themselves from Food and Weight Obsessions and Bulimia: A Guide to Recovery*

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Created by: Susan Albers PsyD © 2004 All rights reserved. For more information see www.eatingmindfully.com. Please note: See website & book for information. If you have serious concerns about your eating, please call your doctor and a mental health professional immediately. This is for informational/educational/discussion only and should not be considered a substitute for treatment. Eat, Drink & Be Mindful!



INTRODUCTION

1. Almost all mindless eaters have tried every fad diet imaginable (the cabbage soup diet, low carb, fat free, sugar free, cabbage soup diet, the Zone, etc.). Describe the types of diets you have tried. How long did they last? Why did they work/not work? Sometimes elements of the diet may have worked or made sense to you. As you were on the diet, how did your body and mind feel? What is the craziest product you tried/bought (maybe from an ad on television or a recipe from a magazine)?

2. We start *Eating Mindfully* with a description of several types of mindless eating habits—mindless dieting, over, under and chaotic mindless eating. Which category best describes your mindless eating struggles. Where there times in your life when you identified with a different category than you do now and why? What life circumstances contributed to your mindless eating at that time and now (a new job, having a baby, stress)? You may notice that many behaviors overlap categories. Don't be surprised if you identify with aspects of each time of mindless eater.

3. The introduction contains an overview and definition of mindfulness & mindlessness. Mindlessness affects people in many ways. What behaviors, in addition to eating, do you find yourself having difficulty doing in a mindful way? (maybe it's being truly present when a coworker tells you about their problems or finding your mind wandering off while it needs to be focused on working). What are the consequences of acting/living in a mindful and mindless way?

4. Mindfulness is drawn from an Eastern perspective. However, the application in this book is not spiritual or religious in nature. If you do yoga or meditation, other behaviors drawn from Eastern philosophy, you know how these can be done without a spiritual connotation. What other mindfulness-like techniques have you already tried and enjoy (relaxation, yoga, deep breathing).

5. This book is about being more mindful of the Body, Mind, Thoughts and Feelings. Which one presents as the most difficult challenge? Which aspect comes most naturally? (Perhaps you are a sensitive person. You've discovered that you need to be more mindful of your feelings rather than avoiding sticky emotions or dramatically overreacting. Or, you might be very analytical and find that you are most comfortable thinking but tend to get stuck in your head. A third example, is someone who is very focused on their body. This person tends to feel "fat" often or reacts strongly to trying on a pair of tight jeans). How does the eating mindfully approach, focusing on these four aspects of eating, contrast with fad diets?

MINDFULNESS OF THE MIND (p. 32-68)

1. Certain foods are more challenging to eat in a mindful way (junk food, sweet & salty foods, things we crave etc.). Which foods are most difficult for you to eat in mindful bites/crave/feel in control? There is a prevalent myth that if it tastes good it has to be “bad” for us. What healthy foods do you eat mindfully and enjoy (kiwis, textured whole wheat breads, calcium rich ice cream, protein filled curry chicken)?
2. There are many media examples of mindless eaters-the cartoon character Cathy is constantly obsessed with her weight and eating, Tony Soprano’s is a classic stress eater, Joey on Friends disregards when he is full and eats sandwiches and Monica’s leftovers to his hearts content. A huge challenge for mindless eaters is deciphering the difference between physical and emotional hunger. How do you know which hunger you are responding to? What states of mind (stressed out, busy, bored) contribute most to your mindless eating (i.e. desk dining, going out to eat). Think for a moment about what you ate today. Which meals and snacks did you eat in a mindful or mindless way?
3. Slowing down the process of eating is intended to help highlight the automatic and repetitive nature of eating. How did it feel to zoom in on the process (uncomfortable, pleasant, strange etc?). What kind of other mindless routines do you fall into time and time again (eat & run, stocking your refrigerator with junk food, avoiding or fearing foods that aren't fat-free).
4. Using food as a way to avoid emotional suffering is an underlying theme of this book. In what way has eating (stress eating, comfort foods) or refusing food (a tight control over what you eat, dieting, skipping breakfast) caused suffering or aided you in avoiding dealing with something painful in your life? What steps have you taken to deal with the issue directly? Have you learned anything about the *reason* you developed mindless eating habits.
5. The Eating Mindfully Contract (p. 53-55) acknowledges how our culture and media can sometimes subtly urges us to diet continually. In what way do you feel subtly or overly pressured to diet? The diet product industry pulls in over *40 billion dollars* a year (statistics according to the National Eating Disorder Organization). What do you think of this dollar amount and what other uses would you put this money toward if you could use it to better the world?
6. The author states that mindless eating isn't just a “girl thing” as our culture likes to imply. Do you hold any stereotypes about mindless eaters?

MINDFULNESS OF THE BODY (p. 72-98)

1. Part II begins with the quote: “Your body is precious. It is your vehicle for awakening. Treat it with care.” Describe the way your body & mind has been impacted by your mindless eating. What do you hope eating in a more mindful way will do for your body? Motivation to continue eating mindfully can be difficult to find but must come from within yourself versus external reasons (for a partner, to get compliments, to fit into a certain dress). Figure out what is important to you and think about how it can help you find the motivation to eat mindfully. Often, what you really love isn’t related to food at all. For example, one client told me how much he loved his antique car. He found the motivation to eat mindfully by remembering how nice it would be to more easily jump into the driver’s seat.

2. Although it is difficult and uncomfortable to think about the effect of mindless eating on your body, have you or anyone you know experienced any subtle or extreme negative physical effects of mindless eating such as an upset stomach, constipation or depression? We often see images of celebrities and the effect of weight loss and gain on their bodies (particularly the positive and negative effects of gastric surgeries). Another recent trend has been the media tracking the weight changes and health of pregnant celebrity moms. What do you hope will change by more aware, in control eating (feel more energetic, feel more positive, no stomach aches etc.?)

3. This book advocates breaking away from the scale. Although the book acknowledges how infrequent or supervised weight ins can be helpful, we know how emotionally impacted many mindless dieters are by numbers. On a scale of 1-5, with one being the most afraid, how much do you fear gaining weight? Also, on a scale of 1-5, how much are your emotions effected by an increase/decrease of 1, 5, 10lbs? What strategies have you used to break away from the emotional impact of the scale (used weight ranges instead of one target weight, weight self once a week, at the doctors, pitched the scale etc.).

4. Many of us have a goal weight that we “cling” to and feel unhappy if we aren't there. p. 82 talks about being unable to “let go of” dreams about your “ideal future body” or “past future body.” How do these images contribute to suffering/pain/mindless eating? Do you believe, like most of us, that thinness is equivalent to happiness? Are you really looking for more self confidence, a healthier life or a higher self esteem?

5. Page 84 has Mindful Eating Acceptance Affirmations. So many factors contribute to our inability love and accept our bodies as they are in this moment (our culture, media, negative messages from parents, perfectionisms, being hard on ourselves, not knowing how to have self compassion). Talk about these affirmations and the reason it is so difficult to accept ourselves just as we are in this moment.

6. Too much or too little of anything isn't a good thing. Talk about the role of exercise in your life. Do you fall into one of these extremes-too much or too little exercise? What

prevents you or helps you to exercise in the middle range? Discuss the relationship between the way you eat and exercise. Any parallels?

MINDFULNESS OF FEELINGS (p. 102-129)

1. The exercise on p.103 urges you to consider how an emotion led to a specific incident of mindless eating. It states to “Retrace your steps. Go over your experience backwards, and identify all the individual steps that led to where you are now.” When you did this exercise, what did you learn about the feeling that triggered mindless eating? How can you use this information in the future? Given what you learned how you use food/restrict food to soothe/get rid of emotions, what are other, non food, related ways of dealing with that particular feeling (going for a walk, calling someone etc). Why is food the first thing we turn to? Are you a stress eater, a boredom eater, munch while watching TV, a food craver, afraid of wasting food?

2. p.107 asks you to create a metaphor that captures the essence of your mindless & mindful eating habits (ie. I feel like a stuffed burrito when I eat mindlessly, I feel as empty as the Grand Canyon-no amount of food could ever fill up my hunger). How did the metaphor you created make you feel (make you laugh, frustrated, hopeful, clarified your issue).

3. Often, we wrap all our self esteem up in our weight, body, and numbers on the scale. When you thought about measuring up your self esteem, what other things, besides your body, raise your self esteem (your job, family, talents). People can often identify the roots of mindless eating and the development of a poor self esteem in their childhood. Can you pinpoint the beginning or contributing factors to a poor self esteem?

4. p. 111 talks about the impact of mindless eating on your relationships. Where you able to identify parallels between the way you eat and how you approach relationships? Do the people in your life know you are a mindless eater or is it a deep secrete. How public do you make your struggles (talking about it endlessly, joking about it, subtle comments, never ever mentioning it). Sometimes your diet can drive other people crazy.

5. The gains and losses people with eating issues face are not just about weight. For example, one woman lost her fiancé. He didn't realize how her eating problems made her push him away. Unfortunately her fiancé took it personally, felt threatened and abandoned her in the process. What relationship gains and loss have you experienced throughout your eating issues? Maybe changes in your weight has let to a lot of positive or negative attention or even concern?

6. Has your eating habits effected anyone close to you? Is there someone in your life who inspires you to eat in a healthy, mindful way (celebrity or friend)? Have you seen any TV shows/movies that taught you something about mindful eating? Are there people who stand in the way (a roommate that you compare your body & eating to or a partner that

makes negative comments about your body)? What are tactful, creative and humorous ways to respond and cope with these people?

7. Holidays & dining out in restaurants are extremely difficult and challenging times for anyone to eat mindfully. What strategies do you use to make sure you eat mindfully? How do you the presence of your family and friends during these times impact your eating (pressure you to eat, urge you to eat desserts you wouldn't normally eat, guilt you into attending meals, watch or comment on what you eat, cook you healthy meals, cheer you on with love and support)?

8. p. 123 Entitled “Accepting Your Genes” is about the genetic and learned eating behavior you get from your family. What's your favorite family trait (eating or non eating related)? Which trait drives you crazy in yourself and other family members? Are their family traditions that encourage/discourage mindless eating? Do you feel you can change these family habits in your current family/life?

MINDFULNESS OF THOUGHTS (p. 134-125)

1. Black and white or extreme thinking is common among mindless eaters. On p., 134-136 did you identify with any of these kinds of errors in thinking? Discuss some of the silliest “Abracadabra thoughts” have you had-if I eat this cookie, I'll gain 5lbs instantly. Why is it hard to stick with thoughts that represent the “middle way?”

2. Food myths are abundant in our society. Even more prevalent are food categories Good Foods vs. Bad Foods, Should's vs. Shouldn'ts, Okay vs. Not Okay, Right vs. Wrong. What's the danger of this and how do you think we pick up this habit. How can we help people dispel food myths and get out of polarizing their feelings about foods?

3. p. 146 talks about planning out mindful meals. What strategies did you take from this book and other people to help you think/plan ahead?

4. This book is a gentle guide intended to model a compassionate approach to change. Can you think of an example of a time in which you witnessed a horrible act of compassionless behavior either toward yourself or someone else? How can we teach our families and society at large to have a more compassionate approach toward their eating and body image? When you hear yourself slipping into self criticism, helps you take a more compassionate approach?

5. People mistakenly believe scolding themselves it will help them produce behavior change. If you are hard on yourself, maybe you won't repeat the same mindless eating behavior again. However, punishment is the least effective way to change behavior. The “Inner Critic” discussed on p. 152 is often even present in our heads. Who does the inner

critic sound like (a friend, your mother, you conscious)? What role does the inner critic play in your thoughts (a subtle voice or maybe a dictator in control)?

6. This book is filled with quotes and sayings. Which one spoke to you? Are there any other sayings that have been particularly motivating to you that you want to share? What do you do with them (put them on a mirror, on your Instant Message away message?)

MINDFUL HELP (p. 155-157)

1. Who has been the most/least helpful in your process of mindful eating? Is there someone who you share your feelings and struggles with freely? What makes that person particularly approachable and important to you?

2. When people seek treatment, there are many reasons that they do not respond or receive proper treatment (lack of insurance, untrained professional, the person isn't ready to make changes). Have you ever been effected by someone who has found helpful/unhelpful strategies or treatment. Have you been frustrated with someone who could benefit from professional help but refused it? How did you approach the situation? Have you met someone or had the experience of being helped or transformed by therapy?

3. For many mindless eaters, getting help means things get worse before they get better. It's not an easy process. What are the most common road blocks you face in getting started?

3. There were short several stories throughout this book. Which one impacted you the most and why?

4. The author states that many people are frightened by therapists/professionals? Have you ever held this belief or feeling? What assumptions did you have about therapy when you opened this book? Were the assumptions supported or challenged?

5. Imagine you are considering contacting a nutritionist/psychologist/physician. Does Eating Mindfully provide any guidelines or suggestions that help you make that decision?

6. What was most/least helpful aspects of this book?

*If you are using this in a group, bring a snack and start out with a mindful eating exercise on page 33-34. Use popcorn, nuts, seeds, raisins, cookies, small candies, orange slices etc. *If you want more ideas for your group, please contact the author.

