



Eating with Heart-Mind

Heart-mind is a Zen expression that I understand to mean a state of being that includes both intelligence and heart. This combination brings wisdom and heartfelt meaning, and connects us to that which is bigger than ourselves.

Eating with heart-mind brings an awareness that allows us to be nourished on many levels: body, mind and spirit. There are many ways we can eat; mindless eating is pretty common. Some of us eat with great control and restriction. Some alternate between periods of abandon and regret. Some eat only because they have to. And some of us eat with heart-mind in a daily celebration that connects us to all life.

Does it matter? I think so. Eating with awareness and a generosity of heart changes the experience of eating. It helps us want to choose wisely, feel more fully nourished and appreciate life. Here are some suggestions for how to practice the heart-mind way of eating.

Planning

Meal planning may sound more like mind than heart, but it can be the structure that allows you freedom. Whether it's a written plan or an idea in your mind, it helps to think about meals ahead of time. Having a plan of some sort allows you to shop and have the food on hand. If something unexpected comes up – no problem, just adjust the plan.

Knowing what you will eat puts your mind at ease so that you can focus on other things. When its time to eat, it's easy. You don't have to stare into the refrigerator while you are starving, wondering what to eat. Having a plan lets you feel in control and allows you to enjoy the food.

Shopping

I used to hate grocery shopping; it felt like a necessary but unwelcome chore. I changed that by changing how I thought about it and finding stores that I really like.

Make grocery shopping a more pleasurable experience by setting aside time for it. Make it part of your routine and focus on what you enjoy most about it.

Cooking

Having a plan and the right ingredients already makes cooking more fun. You may want to try a new recipe each week, or set aside time one or two days (per week? per month?) when you can slow down and immerse yourself in it. On busy days you can plan for quick and easy meals.

If you don't enjoy cooking, could it be because you don't feel skilled? Allow yourself time to experiment and learn new techniques. Cooking and eating well can bring you great joy.



Eating

Make meals conscious. Sit down to eat, at a table that has been cleared of papers and projects. Make it a family event. Turn off the television so that you can focus on your food and conversation. If you eat alone, still set a pretty table.

Pause before you begin eating. Take a few breaths, bringing yourself back to this moment. Tune in to your hunger level. This is a good time for a meal blessing or moment of silence, or let each family member say what they are grateful for.

As you visually enjoy your "feast" take a moment to appreciate the food and to think about where it came from. Imagine sun and soil nourishing this food that is about to nourish you. Think of the hands involved in harvesting it. Have the intention to be nourished - mind, body and soul.

As you eat, savor the food. Notice colors and textures. When you put it in your mouth, note the temperature and the explosion of flavor on your tongue. Take your time, chewing well and fully experiencing this meal.

Put down your fork and pause along the way. Check in with your hunger and satisfaction levels. Are you still hungry? Are you satisfied? Was this enough? Notice how flavors shift and change over the course of the meal. Eat the amount that feels right, regardless of how much food is left on your plate.

When you eat with heart-mind. . .

When you eat with heart-mind, you eat with awareness. There is a sense of grace in it. The focus is not on being good, but on making conscious choices. There is a big difference when you choose to eat one or two Valentine's chocolates and really savor them, versus eating half the box while you think about how you shouldn't be doing this.

Our ancestors had a direct relationship with the food that they spent so much of their time obtaining and preparing. Our relationship with food is often indirect; we may be missing the connection with our sustenance. Eating with heart-mind brings us back to a direct relationship with the food we eat. Having that direct experience makes it more nourishing.

Make 2009 a Healthy Year

Need help fine-tuning your health goals? Want more help eating with joy and awareness, with making conscious food choices? I can help you find what works for you: it makes it so much easier! Call me to find out more: 707 431-7524.

Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

Are you ready to stop dieting and looking for a way of eating that is sustainable, enjoyable and healthy?

Discover Wellness from the Inside Out!

