

# CONSCIOUS EATING

Do you find yourself eating long after you're full? Do you eat because you're bored or depressed? Dietitians give advice on curbing those bad eating habits. Stop! Don't just eat! It's important to become a conscious eater in order to lose weight and be healthy. Eating should be more than just merely placing food in your mouth. The first step in eating should be thinking. Americans are not conscious eaters, says Dr. Rebecca Reeves, a registered dietician and researcher with the Behavior Modification Clinic at Baylor College of Medicine. Dr. Reeves emphasizes the importance of thinking before eating.

The first question to ask yourself before eating is "Are you hungry?" recommends American Dietetic Association spokesperson Nelda Mercer, RD. Mercer says that any reason besides hunger is probably not a good reason for eating. Once you determine you're eating because you are hungry, the next step is to plan what you are going to eat. Mercer says there are three key words to remember when it comes to eating, "balance, variety and moderation."

Mercer recommends looking at your meals in the context of the week. If you eat a meal that is unhealthy for breakfast then balance it out with a healthy, sensible dinner. Pay attention to portion size. Make sure that you eat in moderation. If you practice these concepts you can eat anything, says Mercer.

A good starting point to conscious eating is keeping a food journal. Buy a small book to track the food you eat, the time, where you eat, and your mood. Mercer recommends looking at your journal periodically to recognize any unhealthy habits and make changes accordingly. For example, after analyzing your diet, you may notice a pattern of eating unhealthy breakfasts when you are traveling. You can then change your behavior by planning your breakfast more carefully.

The key to being a conscious eater is planning. "You need to take inventory of what you have and how you shop so you can have the tools and ingredients necessary for healthy meals," suggests Mercer. Good food shopping is a critical step in planning. It is necessary to think like a conscious eater when food shopping. Make sure you look at the food labels. Dr. Reeves stresses, "you've got to do more than look at the ad in the front. You've got to turn it around and look at the nutritional information."

Remember, follow these simple steps to conscious eating:

- **Think before you eat:** Analyze the reasons that you are eating. Ask yourself, "Am I hungry?"
- **Keep a food journal:** Keep track of what you eat by writing it down. This will help you identify trends.
- **Eat balanced meals, vary your menu and most importantly eat in moderation:** Try to eat only healthy foods but an occasional snack food is not taboo if done in moderation.
- **Plan:** Plan your meals ahead of time. Go food shopping in advance and make sure to stock up your cabinets only with healthy foods.
- **Turn it around:** Do more than look at the front labels. Make sure you also look at the food label. Don't just be a conscious eater at home. It's also important to be a conscious eater at the supermarket.

