

## Making Eating a Pleasurable Experience

By: Vera Massey Nichols



Eating is one of life's greatest pleasures.

Unfortunately, Americans have become so focused on food as it relates to losing weight or promoting their health that they have overlooked a very important role that food plays in our lives—providing pleasure.

Many countries around the world recognize what we Americans don't—eating is more than just nutrition.

The Japanese promote pleasure, as a goal of healthy eating “***Make all activities pertaining to food and eating pleasurable ones,***” is one of their dietary guidelines for health promotion. The Norwegian government offers similar advice to their citizens: “**Food + Joy = Health.**” Great Britain and Korea send the same advice: “***Enjoy your food.***”

Reminding people to enjoy what they eat and to make the eating experience a pleasurable one may seem unnecessary. But here in the U.S., where meals are typically eaten on the run and people agonize over their food choices for fear of gaining weight, it is advice that shouldn't be taken casually.

For many people, especially dieters, food is seen as the enemy and the eating experience has become the battleground between “tempting” foods and the willpower to avoid them.

Most dieters (and even non-dieters) have lost sight of how important it is to have a satisfying and pleasurable eating experience. And for those that do derive pleasure, guilt often follows.

If eating is no longer a pleasurable experience for you, consider taking these steps to regain your pleasure in eating.

- 1. Ask yourself what you really want to eat.** If you have been a dieter, you probably are no doubt accustomed to eating what you are told you “should” eat. However, you will gain greater satisfaction when you take the time to figure out what you really want to eat and then give yourself unconditional permission to eat it. When you eat what you are hungry for, you are more likely to feel satisfied without feeling deprived.
- 2. Focus on the actual experience of eating.** Pay attention to the taste, texture, aroma, appearance, and temperature of the different foods you eat. By tuning into the sensual qualities of foods, you will be more likely to choose foods that are most satisfying to you. Otherwise, you'll end up

feeling unsatisfied when you're finished eating and find yourself on the prowl for something else that will satisfy you.

### 3. Make your eating experience more enjoyable.

- ❖ **Savor your food:** Take time to sit down and focus on eating slowly. Remember that your taste buds are on your tongue and not in your stomach. Gobbling your food takes away your chance to really taste it.
- ❖ **Provide variety:** Eating a variety of foods is not only nutritionally wise, but it will give you a more satisfying eating experience.
- ❖ **Eat when you are gently hungry rather than overly hungry:** If you are over hungry, your biological need for energy overrides your ability to eat slowly and savor your food.
- ❖ **Eat in a pleasant environment (when possible):** This allows you to focus more on the eating experience and your level of enjoyment generally increases. When you eat in a tense and hurried environment, you tend to eat faster and your satisfaction level decreases.
- ❖ **Check in: does it still taste good?** Routinely check in with yourself to see if the food still tastes as good as it did when you started eating. If it doesn't, consider stopping, as your satisfaction level is diminishing.

When it comes to pleasurable eating, the bottom line is this—If you learn to eat what you really want, in an environment that is inviting, the pleasure derived will be a powerful force in helping you feel satisfied and content. When you make eating a pleasurable experience, you'll find that it takes much less food to decide when you've had "enough" and the overall quality of food you eat generally increases.

Healthful eating is more than just the right mix of nutrients and calories. It's about promoting well being in a way that can't be measured on a blood test and is as important to overall health as the nutrients in the food you eat.

Eating should be a pleasurable experience for you. If not, it's time to reclaim your right to pleasurable, satisfying eating. Strive to make eating a pleasurable experience for yourself and those around you.