**Understanding the Seven Types of Hunger**

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How many times have you reached for a handful of snacks at a party and munched through them without thinking, or ordered dessert even though you were already completely stuffed, just because it looked so good?

We eat for many reasons - because we’re stressed or feeling sad, because we feel like we deserve a treat or simply because it’s our scheduled mealtime.

Eating mindfully is about expanding our awareness around food habits, so that we can make a more conscious decision of what to put in our mouths and when. According to Jan Chozen-Bays, MD, author of the book ‘Mindful Eating’, there are seven different types of hunger relating to different parts of our anatomy - the eyes, nose, mouth, stomach, cells, mind and heart.

Once we are more aware of these different types of hunger and their reasons, we can respond consciously and more appropriately to satisfy them. Here are the seven types:

**1. Eye hunger**

We are very stimulated by sight, so a beautifully presented meal will be a lot more appealing to us than a bucket of slop - even if the ingredients are the same. *To satisfy eye hunger, we can really feast our eyes on the food before we put it in our mouths. If we mindlessly stuff our dinner in our mouths while watching TV, we’re wasting an opportunity to really appreciate it.*

**2. Nose hunger**

Most of what we think of as taste is actually the smell of the food. Our sense of smell is much more subtle than that of taste, as anyone who’s had a head cold and a stuffed up nose will tell! *To satisfy your nose hunger, practice sensitising yourself to the smell of your food, isolated from taste, by taking a pause before eating to really take in the aromas.*

**3. Mouth hunger**

What we think of as tasty, appealing food is often actually socially conditioned or influenced by our upbringing. This includes how sweet or salty we want our food to be, and the kinds of seasoning and spices we like. What is considered a delicacy in one country can be repellent to another culture. Anyone for deep-fried cockroaches?! Many people’s aversion to raw food is a prime example of this social conditioning of the mouth hunger. Generating greater awareness and a sense of open curiosity around the flavours and textures in our mouths as we eat can help satisfy our mouth hunger.

**4. Stomach hunger**

A rumbling tummy is one of the main ways we recognise hunger. And yet, it doesn’t necessarily mean our body needs food. The hunger cues from the stomach are self-taught - linked to the schedule we’ve given it for when are appropriate times to eat. It takes practice to sense when a grumbling stomach means actual hunger. Often, we can confuse the sensation with other feelings that affect our stomach such as anxiety or nervousness. If we feed anxiety with junk food, then get more anxious about our diet, we can spark off a negative spiral of emotional eating. What to do? *This takes practice. Listen to the stomach’s cues and start to familiarise yourself with them. Try delaying eating when you feel hungry and become aware of the sensations. Assess your hunger on a scale from 1-10 before a meal, then halfway through check in again and do the same.*

**5. Cellular hunger**

When our cells need nutrients, we might feel irritable, tired or we may get a headache. Cellular hunger is one of the hardest types of hunger to sense, even though it is the original reason for eating. When we were children, we intuitively knew when we needed to eat, and what our body was craving. But over time, we lose our ability. Through mindfulness, it’s possible to become more aware of our body’s cravings for specific nutrients and to develop some of the inner wisdom we had when we were children. As Jan Chozen-Bays says, “To learn to listen to cellular hunger is the primary skill of mindful eating.”

**6. Mind hunger**

Modern society has made us very anxious eaters. Constantly being influenced by the current fad diet or the latest nutritional guidelines or research paper, we are deafened by our inner voice telling us that one type of food is good and one type bad, meaning it’s very difficult to pick up on our body’s natural cues. The mind is very difficult to satisfy, as it is fickle and will find something new to focus on if one craving is satisfied. *Mindfulness can help calm the mind and allow for a more sensitive awareness of the other cues our body is sending us.*

**7. Heart hunger**

So much of the time, what and when we eat is linked into our emotions. We might crave certain comfort food because we were given it as a child, or because we’ve associated it in our mind as a treat for when we’re feeling down. Often emotional eating boils down to a desire to be loved or looked after. We eat to fill a hole, but that hole often can’t be satisfied through eating. To satisfy our heart hunger, we need to find the intimacy or comfort our heart is craving. *Try noticing the emotions that you’ve been feeling just before you have an urge to snack and you might be able to find other ways to satisfy them, such as calling a friend or having a cup of tea or a hot bath.*

So, next time you feel hungry, check in with yourself and work out what kind of hunger you’re sensing. If eating is appropriate - go ahead and eat! But try to be mindful of what and how you eat, take in the aroma, feast with your eyes and savour every flavour - then you’ll be truly satisfied.

**We are running a web-based**[**Introduction to Mindful Eating**](http://www.londonmindful.com/20150512-mindful-eating-introductory-workshop-online.html)**on May 12th, 2015. For more details click**[**here**](http://www.londonmindful.com/20150512-mindful-eating-introductory-workshop-online.html)**.**