

A Guided Discovery of *Canada's Food Guide*

Be Mindful of Your Eating Habits



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This lesson is designed to be completed on its own or as part of the series of lessons included in *A Guided Discovery of Canada's Food Guide*. To download the other lessons, visit [TeachNutrition.ca](https://www.teachnutrition.ca).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Registered Dietitians at Dairy Farmers of Canada would like to extend a sincere thank you to Vincci Tsui, a Registered Dietitian and the author of *The Mindful Eating Workbook: Simple Mindfulness Practices to Nurture a Healthy Relationship with Food*, for her support and guidance. This lesson is designed to support students and teachers in developing and maintaining a positive relationship with food using mindful eating as a tool on this journey.

OVERVIEW

Canada's Food Guide (CFG), developed by Health Canada, is an online suite of resources in the form of videos, recipes, and tips that provide guidance about eating habits. Many elements of CFG can be explored with your students, including food choices and eating habits. This lesson will guide students through the CFG section ***“Be mindful of your eating habits.”***

Mindful eating has been linked to improved food choices and a better relationship with food and the body.^{1,2} Some students may be aware of mindfulness practices from their own life or school experiences, but for others this may be a new concept. This resource aims to approach mindfulness in a way that is accessible for your students and gives them the opportunity to try mindful eating to determine if there are aspects of it they would like to try in their own eating experience.

The student workbook gives students the opportunity to build connections between their experiences and CFG recommendations. To complete this activity, students require internet access and a device (e.g., computer, tablet, or laptop) to access CFG online. The activity can be done individually, in pairs or small groups, or as a class, depending on the format of your class.

Note: Throughout this guide, language used in CFG is identified by ***this style***.



Key Learning Objectives

- Identify how Health Canada defines being mindful of your eating habits.
- Identify and describe how we use our senses to experience the world.
- Explore and identify solutions that support students' mindful eating practices.

Materials

- Student workbooks (fillable PDF online or printed copy)
- Computer, tablet, or laptop with internet access
- Access to the *Canada's Food Guide* website: Canada.ca/FoodGuide
- Mindful Eating Activity supplies:
 - Food to taste: bring enough for each student to have a small piece.
Examples: apple chips, cheese cubes, chocolates, pretzels, raisins
 - Napkins

USING THIS RESOURCE IN YOUR CLASS

This resource includes both individual reflection and class discussion components. The Teacher Guide provides you with all the background information needed to successfully facilitate this lesson with your students. To reduce risk of misinformation, **we strongly suggest that class discussion components be done only with the guidance of a teacher**, either in person or during virtual classroom meetings.

Individual reflection components of this resource can be used in multiple ways depending on your class's needs and the resources available:

- **Individually:** Each student completes the resource on their own using a device with internet access.
- **In pairs or small groups:** Divide students into pairs or small groups. Provide each group with a device with internet access. Students can each fill in their individual workbook or the group can fill in one resource.
- **As a class or large groups:** Provide each student with an individual workbook to complete on their own. As a group, navigate the website using one device.
- **In an online learning environment:** Provide each student with the fillable PDF to complete on their own at home. During online class meetings, review answers and discussion topics.

Suggested answers are provided in italics in this Teacher Guide.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

HOW TO TALK ABOUT MINDFUL EATING WITH STUDENTS

The [Center for Mindful Eating](#) defines mindful eating as “using all our senses to be present in the entire eating experience, including choosing and preparing food, while acknowledging our inner wisdom and body cues without judgment.”¹

Mindful eating draws on concepts from mindfulness, which is defined as “deliberately paying attention, non-judgmentally, in the present moment.”³ In other words, mindful eating is an invitation to engage in the eating experience in an intentional way.

How do I talk about mindful eating with my students?

Students in grades 7–9 benefit from opportunities to problem-solve and engage in critical thinking to help make the concept of mindful eating more concrete and relevant to their lives. The activities in this lesson encourage students to use their senses in the experience of eating; this includes noticing the external environment, including what and where we are eating, as well as internal body signals that can indicate hunger, fullness, and satisfaction. By focusing on curiosity and enjoying the learning process you can help students move away from feeling like there is only one way to achieve mindful eating.

RATHER THAN...	CONSIDER...
Telling students to “slow down when eating,”	Explaining that for some people, eating slowly is necessary to engage the senses, but this is not the case for everyone.
Encouraging students to “savour every bite,”	Encouraging students to continue to focus on mindful eating as purposefully paying attention in the present moment, without judgement. Using phrases such as “savour every bite” can imply that all foods taste better when they are eaten slowly, which is not always the case.
Instructing students to “eat when you’re hungry” and “stop when you’re full,”	Acknowledging that there are many reasons why someone may start or stop eating, including a busy schedule, wanting to avoid food waste, enjoyment of food, hunger or fullness, boredom, etc.
Requiring students to eat without distractions, such as having the TV on or reading at the dining room table.	Reframing these “distractions” as part of some people’s eating experience and encourage students to experiment. For example, consider asking what it is like to eat with these “distractions” and without.



Will all of my students be able to practise mindful eating?

There will be situations in which students may struggle to be completely present in the experience, or have trouble engaging all their senses, such as difficult life circumstances, access to resources, neurodivergence, disability, or trauma. It is important to avoid framing student responses as incorrect or drawing attention to these differences in a way that would encourage comparison among the students. Mindful eating is simply an invitation to approach the eating experience in ways that perhaps one may not have done before.

For more information on mindfulness and mindful eating, check out our Mindful Eating article at [TeachNutrition.ca](https://www.teachnutrition.ca).

HOW TO TALK ABOUT FOOD WITH STUDENTS

Teachers know the value of creating a safe and respectful classroom environment. Consider how this principle relates to the messages you share about food and eating. You can help students feel relaxed and supported by talking about all foods in an inclusive way rather than as “good” or “bad.” Neutral food conversations mean there is no judgement of the food or the person eating it.

Roles food plays in eating and life

Food is more than nutrients. But often, foods that do not fit neatly into the categories in CFG are considered nonessential or “junk” foods.

*But what would curry be without turmeric or chilis? Salad without salad dressing?
Consider how a chewy cookie or crispy chips can add flavour and texture to a meal.*

None of these ingredients or foods belongs to a *Food Guide* category, yet they all have value. Health Canada does not support labelling foods “healthy” or “unhealthy.”⁵ Calling foods “unhealthy” or “junk” can harm a child’s relationship with food and their relationships with caregivers who provide food. Making space for a variety of foods contributes to a positive relationship with food and recognizes that factors such as taste, culture, and food traditions play a role in students’ food choices. This view is communicated in CFG and in Canada’s Dietary Guidelines through advice on enjoying food.^{6,7}



Factors that affect food choices

The aim of *A Guided Discovery of Canada's Food Guide* is to explore Health Canada's recommendations and apply them to real world experiences and to making food decisions that respect the reality of students' needs and resources.

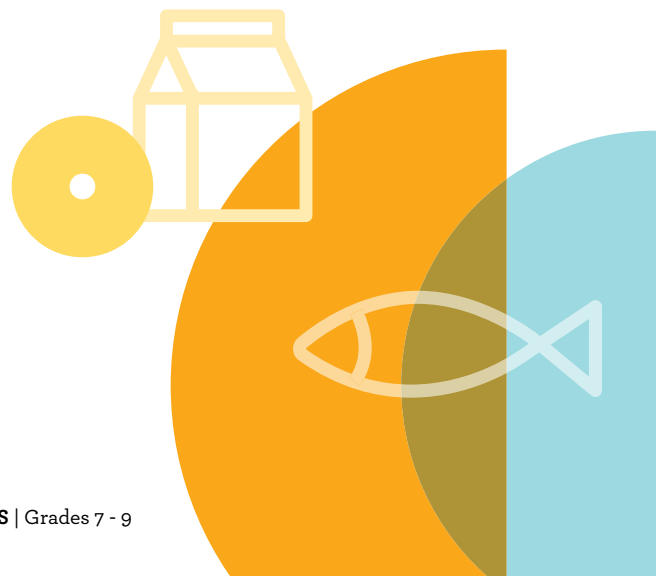
Food choices can be based on many things, including taste, hunger, food traditions, what's available, and personal health. The ability of students and caregivers to meet these needs is tied to access to resources such as money, time, space, skills, equipment, and support. These and many other factors influence what foods students eat at school.

If concerns about a student's food choices come up, pause to consider what the underlying cause for the concern might be rather than commenting on the healthfulness of particular food items. For example, family stressors such as a medical condition may affect a caregiver's capacity to shop for groceries or prepare meals. Like you, caregivers are trying their best to support children. You can help families by fostering a safe food environment at school and encouraging experiential learning with nutrition in the classroom.

If you suspect a family does not have enough food, we recommend speaking to your educational counsellor to help facilitate a conversation with the family about potential supports. This conversation is appropriate for adults; students should not be involved.

Reducing the risk of harm

While this resource includes discussion about nutrients and the benefits of eating a variety of foods, we encourage neutral food exposure and conversation about all foods to preserve and foster a positive relationship with food. Being mindful of how health messages are delivered and avoiding techniques such as food tracking and food monitoring are recommended to minimize the risk of disordered eating behaviour that is associated with these practices.⁸



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This lesson is best completed in the order it is presented. Students can complete the sections in their workbook using either the fillable PDF or printed workbook as you complete the lesson, either as a class, small groups, or individually. We recommend pausing for class discussions as suggested so students can get the full benefit of learning about this topic.

PART 1:

CLASS DISCUSSION: MINDFULNESS

Invite students to open their workbook and review the mindfulness definition included. Ask students,

- Has anyone ever heard of mindfulness before?
- What do you already know about mindfulness?
 - *Students can share their experiences with mindfulness. This may or may not include food-related experiences.*

Lead your class through a simple mindfulness exercise using the script below:

Let's practise being mindful and in the present moment together. During this practice, please keep your answers to yourself, and we will talk about them at the end.

Start by looking around you. What do you see? What are your eyes telling you about the area around you? [Pause briefly, then give some brief examples, such as "I see..."]

Now, let's move on to the other senses. If you like, you may close your eyes or look down. What do you notice with your sense of hearing? You might notice the sound of my voice, and you might also notice the hum of the computer [heater, etc.], the sound of your breathing...

What do you notice with your sense of touch? The sense of touch is not just in your hands. What do you notice about the feeling of your seat and back on your chair? The feeling of your feet on the floor? The temperature of the room?

What do you notice with your sense of smell? [Pause briefly] How about your sense of taste? You might be noticing some sensations that you've never paid attention to, and it's okay if you're not noticing anything with these senses right now too.

Take as much time as you need to continue noticing with your senses. When you are ready, you can fold your hands on your desk to let me know you're ready to move on.

CLASS DISCUSSION

Ask students,

- In that exercise we practised being present in the moment using our senses. This is part of being mindful. Would anyone like to share what that experience was like for them?
- How did this practice make you feel? (calm, happy, uncomfortable, anxious, tired, etc.)
- Was there a part that you enjoyed?
- Was there any part that you did not enjoy?
- What are some of the things you noticed during our practice?
 - *If it's helpful, you may go through each sense as a prompt.*

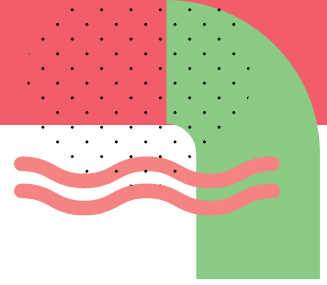
MINDFUL EATING

When applied to food and eating, mindfulness is commonly referred to as “mindful eating.” Without providing the definition from the **Center for Mindful Eating** below, discuss with your students how mindfulness can be applied to eating and create a class definition of what mindful eating means to them. Try to highlight using the senses and avoiding judgement in your definition.

The following questions may be helpful to guide this conversation:

- How might we apply what we have discussed about mindfulness when eating a meal or snack?
 - *Examples: paying attention to each of the senses, setting aside time to eat, paying attention to how different foods make us feel.*
- What senses might you use to be mindful when eating?
 - *Sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing.*
- What feelings come up when you eat different foods?
 - *Students can share any feelings (positive or negative) they experience when eating. Examples may refer to memories about a food, fear around new foods, comfort with liked foods, disliking the taste or texture of certain foods, etc.*
 - *If you are concerned about a student's behaviours or comments related to food or eating, consider connecting the student with additional support.*
- Is it okay to not like a food you're eating?
 - *Affirm that people have different food preferences.*

“Mindful eating is using all our senses to be present in the entire eating experience, including choosing and preparing food, while acknowledging our inner wisdom and body cues without judgment.”¹

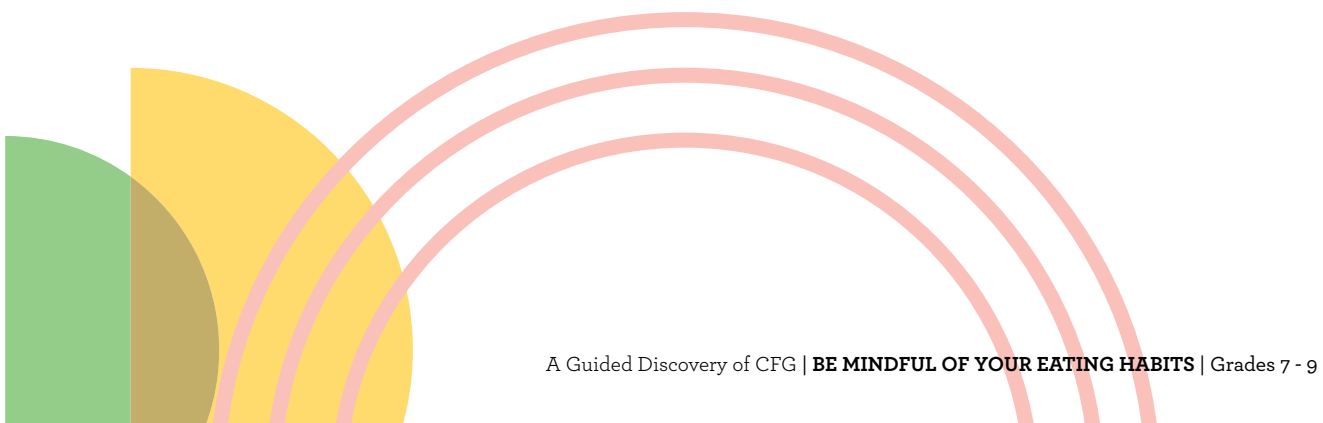


- What influences the food we eat?
 - *Examples:*
 - *Internal influences: hunger, fullness, mood, personal preferences, cultural preferences, perceptions of foods as healthy, etc.*
 - *External influences: food availability, cost, available time, peer influences, , food skills, eating environment, distractions, etc.*
- What influences when we eat?
 - *Examples:*
 - *Internal influences: hunger, fullness, mood, personal preferences, cultural preferences, etc.*
 - *External influences: designated meal or snack times at school, after-school commitments, family mealtimes, food availability, cost, available time, peer influences, perceptions of foods as healthy, food skills, eating environment, distractions, etc.*

As a class, we will explore how mindfulness can be applied to eating and develop a class definition of mindful eating. Later, you will come up with your own definition that works for you.

1

Mindful eating is...





PART 2: INDIVIDUAL WEB EXPLORATION: BE MINDFUL OF YOUR EATING HABITS

- Introduce CFG using a copy of the *Food Guide* Snapshot PDF (available at Canada.ca/FoodGuide or download from <https://food-guide.canada.ca/artifacts/CFG-snapshot-EN.pdf>).
- CFG is more than just pictures of food on a plate. The image of the plate (Snapshot) and all the tabs on the left of the Snapshot page are part of CFG. The bottom of the *Food Guide* Snapshot page, “Discover your *Food Guide* at Canada.ca/FoodGuide,” guides readers to the website where the complete CFG is found.
- Highlight to students that CFG includes recommendations on both food choices and eating habits. One of the eating habits recommended by Health Canada is ***to be mindful of your eating habits***. Today as a class, you will be exploring mindfulness and how it is related to the concept of mindful eating.
- From Canada.ca/FoodGuide, have students click the “Eating Habits” tab on the left and then click “***Be mindful of your eating habits.***”

QUESTIONS

2 How does Health Canada define ***being mindful of your eating habits?***

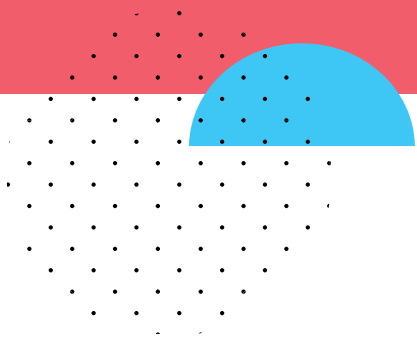
Being mindful of your eating habits means being aware of:

- *how you eat,*
- *why you eat,*
- *what you eat,*
- *when you eat,*
- *where you eat, and;*
- *how much you eat.*

3 Reflect on a meal or snack you've eaten recently and fill in the table:

This is an opportunity for students to reflect on their own eating choices and preferences. An example is provided below, but no answer is right or wrong.

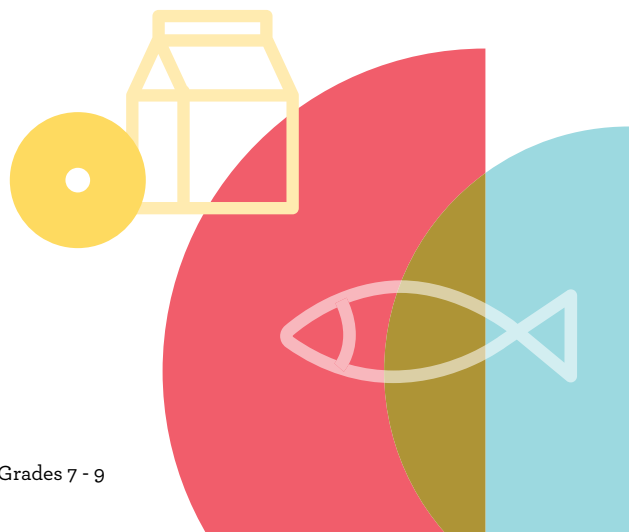
<p>What did you eat? List any specific ingredients you can recall.</p>	<p><i>Cheddar cheese and salted crackers</i></p>
<p>What was its temperature? (cold, room temperature, warm, hot)</p>	<p><i>The cheese was cold. The crackers were room temperature.</i></p>
<p>What was the texture? (crispy, crunchy, smooth, grainy, soft, chewy, etc.)</p>	<p><i>The crackers were crunchy. The cheese was smooth and soft.</i></p>
<p>What did it taste like? (salty, sour, sweet, savoury, spicy, umami, bitter, etc.)</p>	<p><i>Salty Savoury</i></p>
<p>What made you decide to eat it? (hunger, boredom, tiredness, usual meal time, etc.)</p>	<p><i>I was hungry after school.</i></p>
<p>Where did you eat? (home, school, the mall, table, couch, etc.)</p>	<p><i>At home, in front of the TV.</i></p>
<p>How did you eat the meal? (slowly, quickly, with others, by yourself, in front of the television/cell phone, etc.)</p>	<p><i>Slowly, alone in front of the TV.</i></p>
<p>Did you like or dislike the meal or snack you ate?</p>	<p><i>I liked it.</i></p>
<p>What could you have added or changed to make it more enjoyable?</p>	<p><i>I would have preferred Cheddar cheese but we had Mozzarella cheese.</i></p>



4

Based on what you have learned from CFG, were you being *mindful of your eating habits*? Why or why not?

Students can reflect on their own eating experience and on whether they included any aspects of mindful eating.



PART 3: CLASS ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION:

A TASTE OF MINDFUL EATING

This activity guides students to practise using their senses to eat mindfully. Some students may not want to taste the food used for this activity. Let students know it is their choice to eat or not to eat the food item. They can still participate in the guided mindful eating activity.

Students might be impatient during the mindful eating exercise and express that they “don’t like” mindful eating. Tell students that this expression of feelings is a good example of being mindful of their experience and context, and encourage them to notice and explore these feelings without judgement. Acknowledge to the class that this exercise is very slow, so there is enough time to practise each step. This activity is meant to help us notice our senses and thoughts in more detail as we experience this one food. At meals and snacks, we do not need to eat this slowly to be practising mindfulness.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- **Before class**
 - Purchase/obtain the food you will use in your activity. Examples of foods that work well for this activity include small, familiar, manageable snack-like foods such as raisins, chocolates, or crackers.
- **During class**
 - Have everyone wash their hands before handling any food.
 - As the food is handed out, tell students not to eat or touch it until you begin the activity as a class. Pass out one food item per student on a napkin.
 - For students who would like to participate, guide them through a mindful eating exercise using the following script:

This activity is an example of what it feels like to be “in the moment” while eating.

I’d like everyone to sit up in your chairs. Notice your breathing. Let’s take a deep breath together...in...and out...

Without picking up the food, take a moment to notice what you see.

What do you notice? What shape is it? What colour is it?

How do you think it will feel in your hand?

How do you think it will smell?

Now, pick up and hold the food in your hand. Feel the food between your fingers.

What sound does it make, if any?

How does it feel in your hand? What is the texture like?

If you feel comfortable, close your eyes, or look down.

Next, hold the food up to your nose and smell it. What do you notice?

If you’d like to, without chewing, you can put the food in your mouth. Let it sit on your tongue and notice how it feels.

Now, slowly move it around in your mouth. What do you feel or notice? Does it change?

Without swallowing it yet, slowly start to chew on the food. What is the flavour? The texture? Is there more than one flavour? How does it change as you chew it longer? What is the texture like now?

Keep chewing and experience how the flavour and texture continue to change.

If you’d like to, swallow the food. Notice how it feels in your throat when you swallow it. If you do not want to swallow the food, spit it into your napkin.

When you are ready, you can fold your hands on your desk to let me know you’re ready to move on.

Students will answer the following questions in their workbook individually or through a class discussion:

5 How did you feel eating this way?

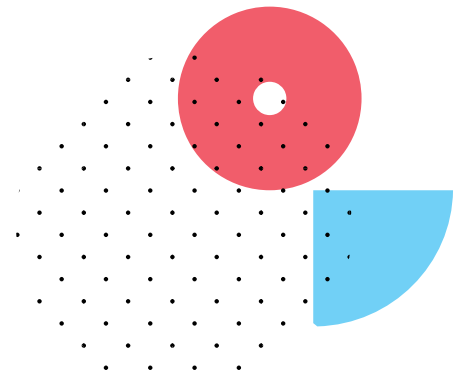
- *Examples: hungry, tired, comfortable, uncomfortable, surprised*

6 During this activity, was there anything you noticed about the food that you might not have normally noticed?

- *Examples: textures, tastes, smells, etc.*

7 Would you like to try this approach to eating again?
Yes/No (circle)
Why or why not?

- *This is an opportunity for students to explore whether mindful eating is a practice they would like to try again. Some students may express that this is not a practice they would like to experience again and that is okay. All answers are welcome.*



PART 4: INDIVIDUAL WEB EXPLORATION: EATING ENVIRONMENTS



Look back at the CFG page “[Be mindful of your eating habits.](#)”

Health Canada talks about trying to create a healthy eating environment. Since the eating environment influences how and what we eat, another way to eat mindfully is to create a positive eating environment at home and at school.

8

In your own words, describe what an eating environment is.

Health Canada describes an eating environment as influences on eating and drinking.

These can include

- *distractions*
- *where you eat*
- *who you eat with*
- *what you are doing while you eat*



9

What are two examples of different eating environments you have experienced?

1

Examples:

- *dining room*
- *kitchen table*
- *in front of the TV*
- *desk*
- *restaurant*

2



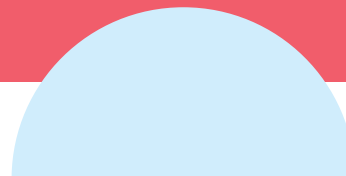
10 Think of your eating environment at school and complete the table.
Try to be as descriptive as possible.

Where do you eat?	<i>In the cafeteria.</i>
Do you eat with anyone? If yes, who?	<i>I eat with a small group of friends. Sometimes we push two tables together so more people can eat together.</i>
What do you see as you eat?	<i>I mostly look at my friends. The cafeteria is big and there are many students around. The lighting is very bright. There are usually a lot of people moving around.</i>
What do you hear as you eat?	<i>There is a lot of noise in the cafeteria. I mostly pay attention to what my friends are saying. I can hear a lot of other conversations around me. I can hear my food as I chew. I can hear the vending machine nearby.</i>
What do you smell as you eat?	<i>There are a lot of smells coming from everyone's food around the table. I usually eat a sandwich and yogurt parfait so it does not have a very strong smell but Jasper always brings soup in a thermos and that often has a strong smell.</i>
How do you eat? (at a table, on a couch, on the floor, with my hands, fork, chopsticks, straw)	<i>I eat at a table while sitting on a chair. Most of the time I eat with my hand. I use a spoon for my yogurt. My water bottle has a straw so I usually use that.</i>
Do you do anything else while you eat?	<i>Sometimes I'm on my phone. Usually I talk with my friends.</i>

- 11 Imagine your ideal eating environment. This can be any location (school, home, a restaurant, etc.). Answer the same questions.

Where do you eat?	<i>My favourite restaurant.</i>
Do you eat with anyone? If yes, who?	<i>A big group of all my friends. The tables are big enough that we can all eat together.</i>
What do you see as you eat?	<i>My friends mostly. The lighting is a bit dimmer. There are usually candles on the table. The table is set with napkins, cutlery, and water glasses.</i>
What do you hear as you eat?	<i>Music is always on in the background. I can hear the cooks in the kitchen. Lots of chatter from my friends.</i>
What do you smell as you eat?	<i>I mostly smell the food. My favourite thing to order is pizza and I like the smell of it baking in the pizza oven.</i>
How do you eat? (at a table, on a couch, on the floor, with my hands, fork, chopsticks, straw)	<i>We eat at a table. I always eat my pizza with a fork and a knife when I'm here.</i>
Do you do anything else while you eat?	<i>I just eat and talk with my friends.</i>





12

What do you notice is different in your school eating environment in question 10 and the ideal eating environment you described in question 11?

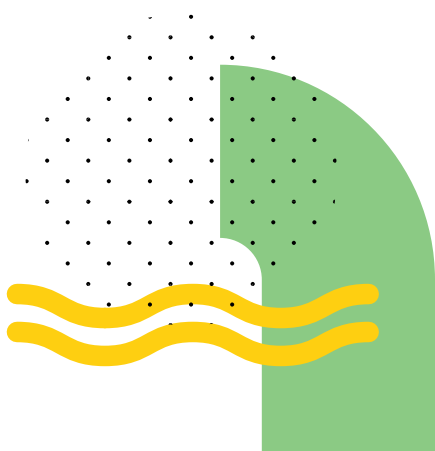


Students can compare their two charts and note any similarities.

13

What do you notice is the same in both your school eating environment in question 10 and the ideal eating environment you described in question 11?

Students can compare their two charts and note any differences.

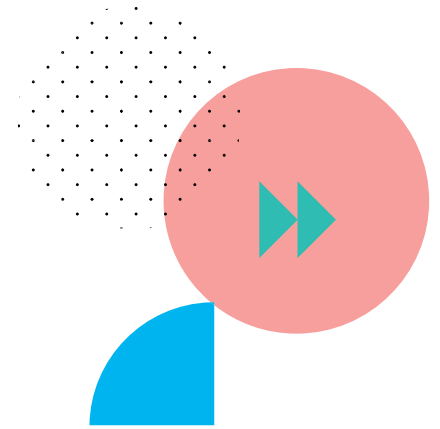


14

How do you think your experience of eating mindfully might change when you are in your ideal eating environment?

Examples:

- *I pay more attention to what is going on around me.*
- *I slow down when I eat.*
- *I pay more attention to the food I am eating.*



15

Are there any changes you could make to your current school eating environment to reflect your ideal eating environment? Describe them.

Examples:

- *Listening to music at the table.*
- *Using cutlery when eating.*
- *Taking a deep breath before starting a meal.*
- *Turning off technology.*
- *Giving thanks to the farmers and those who prepared the meal.*



PART 5: INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now that you have explored the concept of mindfulness and how it applies to eating, answer the following questions:

16

From what you have learned, how do you define being mindful when you eat?

- *Students provide their own definitions of what being mindful means to them when eating.*



16a

How is this similar to or different from your class definition of mindful eating in question 1?

- *Students provide their own explanations of how their own definitions of being mindful when eating differ from the class definition.*



16b

How is this similar to or different from Health Canada's definition of being *mindful of your eating habits* in question 2?

- *This is an opportunity for students to compare their experience with mindfulness with Health Canada's definition and the classroom definition from the beginning of the lesson. Differences in these answers are encouraged because at this point students will have done a deeper dive into mindfulness.*

17

What is one thing that could be done at school to support mindfulness (at meals or in the classroom)?

Examples:

- *Take time to notice the way my food feels, smells, and looks before tasting it.*
- *Try eating lunch without my phone twice a week and pay attention to how that changes my lunch experience.*
- *Choose a different snack that I would enjoy more.*
- *Add sauces, spices, or dessert to the meal so I enjoy it more.*

18

In question 3 you reflected on a recent meal or snack you ate. If you were able to have eaten that meal more mindfully, would any of your answers change? Why or why not?

- *This is an opportunity for students to reflect on how practising mindfulness while eating can change the experience of eating. If a student feels they were already mindful, treat this as valid and equal to other students' suggestions of improvement, as this is a reflection of their own experience.*

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