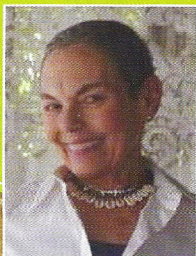


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

EVE ELIOT is a psychotherapist, yoga instructor, meditation teacher, and contributor to *Annals of Psychotherapy & Integrative Health*. Her unique use of metaphor to teach mindfulness makes it easier for students to access the stillness available through meditation. Eliot is the author of the meditation CDs *Meditations for Every Occasion: Operating Manual for Consciousness*; *Marrying the Moment: Meditations for Softening Hardship*; *First Aid: Meditations for Troubled Times*; *Tooth Fairy Speaks: A Dentist Appointment You Can Love*; *Contentment Meditations*, and *Holding Still to Free the Butterfly: Meditations for Squirmly Kids*, and of the books *Attention Shoppers: The Woman's Guide to Enlightenment Through Shopping*; *Insatiable: The Compelling Story of Four Teens, Food and Its Power*; and *Ravenous: The Stirring Tale of Teen Love, Loss and Courage*. The meditations are available from iTunes and other sites as downloads and from CDBaby.com as CDs. Her Web site is eveeliot.com.



Meditation for *Eating*

You could be anywhere; you could be on a boardwalk eating ice cream. You could be in a restaurant alone or with a friend or two. You could be at home or even munching in your car. We eat everywhere. Eating can be an unmindful act. How non-judgmentally present we are when eating determines how emotionally nourishing an eating interval is. And, when we do think back to our last encounter with food, we may well realize we were unaware of how it tasted or even of how much we had eaten.

It is difficult to be non-judgmental about eating. Magazine covers feature stories with titles such as *How to Lose Thirty Pounds in Thirty Days* and *How to Have a Flatter Tummy by Summer*. We find ourselves on the supermarket checkout line staring at headlines proclaiming that we can be 10 pounds thinner practically by the time we get home. Celebrities with professional chefs and personal trainers share their secrets of how they got into a bikini two weeks after giving birth to twins. Naturally, we worry...that we have eaten too much, too often, or too late at night. We worry we have eaten the wrong kind of fats or carbs. There is guilt about the latest "taboo" food group.

In a country where food is so plentiful for a considerable percentage of the population, chemists formulate foods without calories while huge numbers of individuals in so many other countries are starving.

We spend so much time eating without awareness. While so many don't have enough food to even sustain their lives, we eat to soothe, to socialize, to distract, and to deafen ourselves to the judgmental voice within more often than we eat for sustenance. How can we declare peace with eating amid all this?

The very act of eating can become a meditation. Please take a moment to taste this idea. PAUSE to chew on it. PAUSE. Instead of food being something that “eats your heart out,” eating can become nourishment for the heart while sustaining the body. And meditative eating will bring the body to a stable, appropriate weight far more easefully than strenuous deprivational dieting, with its rebellious binging in the aftermath of enforced restriction.

Eating is sacred, a kind of biochemical magic. Hear that. Breathe...and know that. Let that possibility land in you. Taste it. Observe. When we place food into the body, that food transforms into a part of us. It becomes us. Whatever we eat, no matter what the food group, no matter what the context, that food is going to become our blood, our bones, skin, and eyelashes. An apple brings raw materials for the manufacture of energy, of breath. The oil in an almond silken the hair. Everything we eat is building material. Food transforms into a part of our heart. Proteins feed the muscles that make walking and breathing possible and are transformed into the neurotransmitters that determine our moods, thoughts, and emotions.

Food can make us cranky or calm, lethargic or energized. Often, we do not behave as though we realize that. We long for love, calmness, and clarity, and yet we eat dismissively, on the run, and without discernment. And all the while, food has the capacity to bring the connective empathic feeling states that we name “love” possible.

Meditative calm can be found in chewing. In tasting. In the presence these practices bring. As long as we have to eat, we might as well be using eating as a meditation, an opportunity to practice mindfulness...non-judgmental awareness of the present moment.

Here is how to eat for the best chance at peacefulness in only a few minutes.

For your next eating encounter, try slowing down. Even fast food can be eaten slowly. Savor two consecutive bites by taking a breath between each of the bites and by chewing for longer than is customary for you. Close your eyes, if that helps you direct your focus inward.

Settle. Reflect.

Catch up by slowing down. Catch up with the natural rhythm of your own body by slowing down to examine what you are doing, feeling, and noticing while you are eating.

Taste the blue sky in the corn.
The rain in the green beans.

Envision the field of wheat where the pasta or pizza crust originated... and see the breeze swaying the tall grasses there.

Experience the sweet imagined fragrance of that breeze in that field as you chew, before you swallow and rush into the next bite. Let there be a moment of reverence for the miracle of transformation.

Let each bite be welcomed, without judgment. That is important. Judgment is extremely indigestible.

Chew each mouthful 15 times before swallowing. Feel how this mindful intake slows down time, makes each eating encounter last longer.

Just two more bites like that—slow, aware eating, utilizing as many senses as possible before swallowing. Chewing on the images of where the food grew, where in the world it came from.

What sky did it spend time beneath? What was the word for rain in the language of its country? Wonder about all this. You can Google all this later...for now, chew, and taste, slowly.

Reflect on the repairs taking place in the cells when the food arrives in your body, bringing construction materials to fill in gouges in bone, replace worn-out cells with fresh new ones, feed muscles hungry for replenishment.

Food arrives to rescue exhausted joints, to nourish depleted blood.

As part of a most amazingly intricate engineering design, food provides energy for the circulatory system to deliver fuel to cells and oxygen to the lungs. Food makes breath possible.

Know this. Breathe.

And know that you are breathing.

Hear the breath. Taste it.

Allow yourself to chew on and swallow the wonder of this brilliant phenomenon: eating. Every food encounter can be a time of thanksgiving. Give thanks.

