



So often we eat mindlessly. We stuff food into our mouths while working on the computer, watching TV, or when we're on the run. The pleasure of eating lies in slowing down and fully experiencing all of the elements of food. Take some time to explore each of the following during your next meal and notice the difference.

Sight: Look at your food and imagine you are a Martian scientist. You just arrived on Earth and have never seen this food before. Look at it carefully without naming it. Can you see the water, the rain and the sunlight within the food?

Smell: Bring the food up to your nose. Without naming the scent, experience smelling the food, and then describe what you smell.

Physiological reaction: Now focus on what is going on in your mouth. Begin to notice that saliva is produced, even though you haven't yet put the food in your mouth. Notice the mind/body phenomenon and how the senses respond to the anticipation of food being eaten.

Touch: Now explore how the food feels. Without naming the sensation, just experience touching your food.

Motion and movement: How is it that your hand knows how to move the food directly to the lips? As you bring the food up to your mouth, notice what happens next. The mouth receives the food. Nothing goes into the mouth without it being received. And who or what is doing the receiving? The tongue. Observe what the tongue does with it. How does it get the food between the teeth? It's amazing that the tongue is so skilled, and that such a remarkable muscle can actually receive food and then know what to do with it every time.

Taste: After becoming aware of the food in your mouth, start biting into it very slowly. Then begin to chew. Notice that the tongue decides which side of the mouth it's going to chew on. Give all your attention to your mouth and take a few bites. Then stop to experience what's happening. What is happening is invariably an explosion of taste. Express what's going on. Be really specific. What is the experience? Is it sweet or sour or juicy? There are hundreds of words to describe the experience of tasting.

Texture: As you continue to chew the tastes change, as does the consistency. At a certain point you will become aware of the texture of the food because the taste has mostly passed. If the texture causes aversion, you may want to swallow it, but try to keep it in your mouth.

Swallow: Don't swallow it yet. Stay with the impatience and the inborn impulse to swallow. Do not swallow until you detect the impulse to do so. And then observe what is involved in getting the food over to the place where it's going to be swallowed. When you detect the impulse to swallow, follow it down into the stomach, feel your whole body and acknowledge that your body is now exactly one bite heavier.

Breath: Next, pause for a moment or two, and see if you can taste your breath in a similar way. Bring the same quality of attention to the breath that you gave to seeing, feeling, smelling and tasting the food.

Silence: Be silent. By this point, you understand something of what meditation is. It is doing what we do all the time, except we're doing it with attention: directed, moment-to-moment, nonjudgmental attention.

You can also do this with another person, moving the food close to their mouth, but not all the way into their mouth. You can even massage their lips with the food to see what happens. The main thing is to have fun, learn something and understand yourself better.