

Can Mindful Eating Help Us When We Struggle With Eating? Mindful Eating Replaces Diets.

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Abstract

Eating and weight related disorders are spreading widely all over the world. Individuals and health professionals are seeking effective and lifelong treatments for them. The purpose of this review was to summarize researches and evaluate the effectiveness of mindfulness and mindful eating on obesity, disordered eating and eating disorders. Practicing mindful eating has being used for emotional eating, binge eating, food cravings, and weight management. Past reviews interpreting the association between being mindful eating strategies and eating behaviors or attitudes may be showing us that mindful eating is the best way to deal with eating issues. Mindfulness and mindful eating related approaches can be used as a part of the treatment plans of obesity, disordered eatings and eating disorders due to the fact that these therapies are being worked as effectively practical.

Key words: mindful eating, mindfulness, obesity, eating disorders, disordered eating.

INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness and eating

In the last 30 years, mindfulness has become popular and effective in treatment plans of stress and eating issues (13,17,26). Mindfulness has been described as 'bringing a certain quality of attention to moment by moment experience (23). The description of mindfulness, has been expressed as 'increasing awareness and responding skillfully to mental processes that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviour' (7). In a similar study, it was defined as 'a psychological stable of cognitive skills that allows to bring complete attention to the present and experience on moment-to-moment basis in a nonjudgmental and nonreactive manner' (9). It seems to be hard to

define mindfulness and also mindful eating just by a sentence, so in this review it will be tried to express by some researches.

Mindfulness is a process that includes awareness of both the internal processes and the environmental factors that come from the outside; being mentally, emotionally and physically exactly in that moment (4,6,7). Mindfulness is binge at the moment, it is not just living in present moment. So being mindful requires attention and sense everything nonjudgementally. Mindfulness associated with health issues (23,24) and especially stress reduction (7). Although mindfulness is associated with many health conditions, now that we know it is related to eating too. It has been shown that in individuals who have high

mindfulness state and self-love, the decrease in body weight is higher. There is a strong relationship between negative automatic thoughts and body weight gain (29). It was later advocated that it would be beneficial to develop mindfulness and self-love in order to help body weight loss in the research related to mindfulness and body weight management which is the continuation of the same research (30,31). They found that mindfulness affected body weight loss independently, and that weight loss and self-love were positively related. In the continuation of the study, they found a strong negative relationship between negative automatic thoughts and body weight loss. In the intervention part of the research, mindfulness and self-love trainings have been given and it was observed that mindful eating is increased at the end of the research (30). Subsequently, in a similar study, the effect of mindfulness based eating training on impulsivity and body weight management was observed. When we look at the pre- and post-evaluations, it was shown that body weight and body mass index (BMI) were decreased (42). In another randomized controlled study, after the mindfulness training, body weight and mindfulness state of the participants were associated. At the end of the trainings, it was observed that BMI was decreased and physical activity status is increased in the intervention group. In addition, the sub-factors of the scales applied were examined and external eating and emotional eating and binge eating symptoms were decreased (43).

In a randomized controlled trial, researchers provided mindfulness training focusing on changing eating behaviors to one group by giving exercise guidance aimed at increasing diet and daily physical activity, with a mild energy restriction, and provided training for stress management with cognitive behavioral techniques. When the results of the study were examined, the emotional eating states of the group who received awareness training decreased statistically significantly compared to the other group (34).

Mindfulness by itself, has effects on managing internal and external factors such as portion control (3,4,9), preventing emotional eating (6,7,9) stopping overeating (12,21) within the scope of mindful eating, so it plays an important role in weight management. In a study, it was aimed to change the eating behavior with mindfulness based stress training and after awareness training, a significant decrease was found in emotional eating and

uncontrolled eating states, which are the sub-factors of the scales (29). In previous studies, it was emphasized that the relationship between disinhibition, which is dependent on external factors and emotional eating, is strong in obese individuals (1,4,11).

Mindful eating

Mindfulness has been adapted to define eating behaviors, as a result the name and definition of mindful eating have been created (20). With the understanding of the importance of mindful eating, a measurable tool has been developed (16) and adopted to Turkish (26). Mindful eating means to stop, think and act by being aware of what you eat and eating consciously, not eating as a reflex (5). Mindful eating is defined, for the first time in Turkish in a study, 'With realizing how and why eating behavior occurs rather than what is eaten; internalizing physical hunger-satiety clues and being aware of the effect of emotions and thoughts; without being affected by environmental factors and being focused on the food that will be consumed at the present moment without judging the food choices' (26).

Mindful eating can be useful to make healthier and more satisfying choices by being aware of the food consumed without being affected by the individual's body weight or nutritional status. It is related to intuitive eating but contains outer wisdom too. Satisfying the individual and feeding the body of the individual in the process in which all senses should be used is an important part of mindful eating. The individual should also be aware of what type of hunger is present and accordingly determine when to start and when to stop eating through internal processes (6,16). Mindful eating has the potential to reduce automatic and inattentive reactions. With mindfulness, emotional eating, that caused by emotional triggers, will lose its effect on unnecessary food consumption will decrease (6,7). Automatic eating can be inevitable in such cases. In those who experience mindful eating, the effectiveness of the automatic eating can be impaired (deautomized) and their response to craving improves, so body weight management will be provided (5,36). Mindful eating has also nutritional knowledge and external issues. Knowing nutrients, foods, healthy choices and the participants that have high scores on mindful eating named as 'mindful eaters'. Being a 'natural mindful eater' is a key to have anything but eating problems (6).

Mindful eating with obesity, disordered eating and eating disorders

Eating, nutrition and weight related problems have been increasing nationally and globally. Eating behavior outcomes are changing to binge eating, emotional eating, external eating, and dietary intake. And when individuals can not do anything about them, they feel hopeless so apply any other options like overexercising, using laxatives or diuretics or fasting (10,18). Eating has become a complex issue for people in last years. Now treatment plans are including different types of therapies rather than conventional ones. Because now that there are so many changes in daily life (social media, online games etc.), we should have best solutions for patients.

In a study on body weight management in women, mindful eating training about food consumption outside the home was given. Considering the training content, trainings were provided within the scope of a broad mindful eating in the form of nutritional contents related to body weight management during food consumption outside, individualized strategies to reduce food intake while outside home and mindful eating practices. When we look at the exercises in detail, trying to make the eating experience enjoyable by drawing attention to the size, smell and texture of the food, and in relaxation exercises were applied by focusing on the emotions and thoughts that trigger hunger, taste, stomach satiety and eating. As a result, body weight and energy intake were decreased significantly in the intervention group compared to previous consumptions. It was also found that body weight management is important when consuming food outside (43). In a randomized controlled study, the effect of mindful eating training with type 2 diabetes was observed. While there was no difference in body weight management in mindful eating educated group, it was found that energy intake and sugar consumption decreased significantly compared to the other group (35).

Overeating has been divided into emotional overeating (such as anxiety) and external overeating (the image / smell of food). In a study the researchers evaluated the relationship between disinhibition and overeating and being slightly obese within the framework of emotional and external overeating (44). Experiential avoidance exists in both emotional and external eating

behaviors. Mindful eating reduces food craving (1) and plays an active role in maintaining body weight management (15). In a previously mentioned study, randomized controlled mindfulness intervention was applied to reduce the effect of stress-induced eating on abdominal fat gain. It has been observed that there is a relationship between consuming meals mindfully (by the mindfulness trainings) and body weight loss (24).

In a study examining the relationship between obesity and emotional eating, the relationship between emotional eating, overeating, and the restrictive factor and overweight group was found to be strong. In the same study, emotional eating was found to be effective in the relationship between overeating and overweight (12). In a review researchers suggested mindful eating should be added in weight management treatment programs especially for obese individuals (13). Even if there are some studies that have modest improvements about weight loss, programs' long-term effect was effective weight management. Similarly, in 2019 a review about mindful eating and the relationship between diets and obesity, reviewers concluded that studies were focused on weight loss but the most important issue is being in a strategy that not based on energy restriction or restricted diets, so we can use mindful eating approaches (17).

Impulsive eating, which is similar to automatic eating, also leads to rapid food consumption and can make body weight management become difficult. Regaining after body weight loss and the relationship between impulsive eating and disinhibition are also found to be strong (15,25). Especially an impulsive individual may have difficulties to pay attention, so it may be resulted being unable to postpone satisfaction (31). It was proved that mindfulness trainings that target hedonic eating will be more effective than energy restriction with the implementation of obese individuals (34). Considering the preliminary study results, mindful eating interventions have been shown to be a powerful tool in reducing body weight, emotional and automatic eating. In short-term studies, it was stated that trainings given through mindfulness are effective in body weight management and this can be provided permanence by making these studies long-term (12,24,31,36). On the other hand, a study showed that mindfulness training is effective in making healthy food choices, but it does not affect portion control (32). It was pointed out that mindful eating trainings are

effective on daily energy intake, permanent body weight loss and glycemic control. At the end of the research, although the practices about mindfulness did not provide a reliable result in reducing energy intake, it was proved that it is a reliable tool in preventing overeating and thus preventing body weight gain. As a limitation of the study, it was shown that long-term results were not evaluated (35).

Binge eating disorder (BED) (2) treatment plan need a team and it has been used mindfulness-based interventions in recent years (19). Especially since 2008, mindful eating has also gained popularity (1,5,41). With these BED treatment plans, weight, glycemic control, cravings, emotional eating and external eating can be managed. Mindful eating interventions are also frequently used in binge eating disorders and help reduce emotional and automatic eating. It was claimed that cognitive distortions indirectly affect symptoms of binge eating and BMI, so cognitive distortions are the main process that needs to be improved (42).

Bulimia nervosa's (BN) (2) treatment plan should include psychotherapy and nutrition educations. In last years in addition to this plan, mindfulness-based interventions and mindful eating trainings have been used (8,27). Mindfulness-based eating awareness training (MB-EAT) improves emotional eating, good food choices, following hunger and satiety clues in best ways (28). The researches are growing and becoming better for treatment of eating disorders (11,38,39). Because individuals with binge eating and bulimia nervosa can not spend the energy that they intake, the result is simple: weight gain. Consuming large amounts of food will last with adiposity. That is why nutrition plan should be included to the treatment plan but not diets (10). With the plan when there is an intervention about mindful eating, it will end with less emotional and external eating because individuals become aware of their hunger and satiety clues, gain mindful eating skills (37). In a randomized controlled trial, group trainings (introduction to self-regulation, mindful eating exercises, binge triggers, types of hunger, taste and satisfaction tips, fullness, forgiveness, inner voice / wisdom, evaluation) and follow-up among overweight and obese groups with binge eating disorders (practices, observations, body weight management) were applied. In the evaluations made after the trainings, it was stated that 95% of the individuals who had a binge eating in overweight

and obese group are no longer meet the diagnostic criteria of binge eating disorder. Mindful eating training was found to have a high impact on binge eating episodes and body weight loss (28).

Anorexia nervosa (AN) is a hard to handle psychiatric disorder. It can be deadly risky for health and the end can be mortal (2). Anorexia's treatment should be careful and intenteive. Sometimes plan should be inpatient. In this plan there should be a dietitian beacuse patients need to learn 'accurate' knowledge of nutrition adn eating attitudes. Nowadays mindfulness and mindful eating programs are being used by researchers (14). In a study that was conducted 10-week mindful eating program with AN patients and found significant decreases in eating disorder symptoms at the end (22). Similarly in a research, it is found that first focused intervention to meal or snack is not working, when individuals used a mindful eating strategy as focusing on their five senses, hunger and satiety clues, it is significantly successful (33). They pointed out that mindful eating is an effective therapy for individuals with AN. Then in another study researchers used orange labeling for mindful eating practice as recording thoughts when participants were eating an orange and there was a successful result for the treatment (40).

CONCLUSION

Recent years 'being at the moment' as mindfulness has become important. Mindful eating is getting popular because it dominated by the view that the results of gaining mindful eating skills rather than traditional dietary treatments, in which the energy-reduced diet program is prepared and nutritional trainings are supported, are more effective. It should be added to the eating disorders treatment program beacuse even if treatments are successful, individuals may regain weight after months or years. Dietary-oriented interventions is not a permanent solution in body weight loss, and more permanent solutions can be achieved by directing behavioral interventions to healthy eating habits by gaining mindful eating skills about eating, nutrition and satiety. Mindful eating has effects on body weight management and eating attitudes, behaviors. In the proposed treatment system of disordered eating and eating disorders; psychiatrist, psychotherapist and dietitian can work together for the purpose of providing mindful eating skills with healthy, lifelong, sustainable eating behaviors and weight management can be achieved.

Suggestions

Nutrition consultances, trainings, educations and diets can be useful for weight management and eating problems in a short time like for a month, a year or 5 years. Besides theoretical therapy, there should be a plan that works lifelong. That is why mindfulness and mindful eating approaches will be useful for eating and weight management treatments.

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