

# Unclear whether mindful eating can help you lose weight, says review

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It is unclear whether mindful eating can help with weight loss, according to a new City, University of London review.

The paper, which is published in the journal *Clinical Psychology Review*, found although mindfulness-based [weight management](#) programs have had some success, it is not always clear that the mindfulness components were responsible.

According to the review, research in this area is further complicated by the fact that the term 'mindfulness' is used to refer to a range of different practices. Additionally, there is still little understanding of the mechanisms by which mindfulness might exert its effects, and as a result further research is needed.

Levels of overweight and obesity have increased dramatically over the last three decades, and globally 1 in 3 adults are now overweight or obese, with more than 3 million deaths attributed to the condition every year.

As well as being associated with increased mortality, being overweight or obese is linked to a wide range of [chronic health conditions](#) such as type 2 diabetes, [coronary heart disease](#) and cancer. In addition, overweight and obesity are estimated to have a global cost of \$2.0 trillion a year, which is equivalent to the cost of armed war, violence, and terrorism.

However, mindful eating is increasingly being promoted as a solution to being overweight, with the practice claiming that it will help us eat less, transform our relationship with food and end our battle with [weight](#) once and for all. Such techniques are currently being employed by a number of healthcare organisations, as well as being promoted as a strategy for weight management and eating regulation amongst the general public.

The term 'mindfulness' can be used to refer to a range of different practices and can be defined as 'awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the [present moment](#), and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment'. This definition includes two key ideas; that of paying attention to present moment experience, and also of taking a non-judgmental attitude towards this experience.

When it comes to mindful eating, such approaches can include attending to the [sensory properties](#) of food, and also decentering, which involves viewing ones thoughts and feelings as temporary events that are separate from oneself.

To investigate the evidence-base for mindful eating, a literature search was undertaken which aimed to identify all studies that examined the independent effects of mindfulness (or a mindfulness-related strategy) on either weight loss, or a behavioural outcome closely associated with weight management, namely quantity or type of food consumed.

The review found that there is little understanding of how mindfulness might work with respect to eating and weight management. However, the study identified that the two areas that show the most promise are present moment awareness of the sensory properties of food, and decentering. However, there is still relatively little research examining these techniques, and no rigorously conducted studies have examined their effects on

[weight loss](#) or weight maintenance. As a result, whether such techniques can actually help with weight management remains to be seen.

Dr Katy Tapper, a Senior Lecturer from the Department of Psychology at City, University of London said:

"We simply can't say with confidence that [mindful eating](#) can help with weight management. A diversity of practices have been labelled as mindfulness, and the effects of each of these on weight management related eating behaviours are far from established. As such we need to invest in more carefully controlled experimental studies before developing and promoting additional mindfulness-based weight [management](#) interventions."

Provided by City University London

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