



Conscious Eating for Diabetics

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In this fast paced, information everywhere, society in which we live, as a diabetic we are bombarded with conflicting information daily about our disease, its cure, food we should eat, and even how we should eat. In this brief we are going to look at the Conscious eating trend and how it appears to be in conflict with what western medicine is telling us, and how we might adapt this lifestyle as a diabetic or pre-diabetic to bring about positive changes in our lives as we manage this chronic disease.

Introduction

Before we dive into how diabetics can be Conscious eaters, I want you to take Just a minute or two and think back to your day yesterday or the day before. How many choices confronted you during the day? How many times did you think about food? How did you perceive those choices? Were they tied to any emotional feelings? Did you think about what you ate after you ate it? Write down that number on a piece of paper and we will get back to it later in this brief. For now, keep those thoughts in the forefront of your mind as you read thru this article.

While there are subtle differences between Conscious, Mindful, and Intuitive eating, my goal is to bring awareness to some of the overlapping principles and lifestyle changes they bring to our eating habits moving forward. All of them strive to bring a 'conscious awareness' to the food choices we make, why we are making them, and how we deal with the emotions associated with our choices. All of them bring about a change in your thinking about dieting, what we buy at the supermarket, and what we eat when dining out.

Diets don't work

It's a fact that Americans are growing, and not in a good way. By current estimates the United States obesity rate is reaching epidemic proportions. But why? Simply put losing weight by cutting calories and deprivation doesn't work. The reason is that once the goal weight is reached, we go back to the old eating habits that had us adding the extra weight in the first place. Want proof? Simply look at the statistic that over 90% of those who go on a diet will put the original weight back on PLUS an extra 10-150% more within 1 to 5 years of dieting. Additionally, diets cut calories by depriving us of the things we love to eat. Who doesn't like chocolate, cake and the sugary desserts? Couple that with the fact that weight loss is goal oriented, i.e.- need to fit in that new dress, getting married in 3 months, taking a trip, or just I need to lose 10 pounds, you can see yourself accomplishing your goal and then you begin the reward cycle. I can have that piece of chocolate, I can eat that whole dessert, etc. All of this adds to the obesity figures today!

Obesity in America is alarming. Based on the CDC and the NHANES, there are currently an estimated 39.6% of adults who today are classified as obese or severely obese (Obesity Rates, n.d.). Our country spends **over 149 billion dollars annually in healthcare costs** for those Americans. The diet industry itself generates over **60 billion dollars a year**. It's no wonder we our inundated with diet-based marketing every New Years, from Marie Osmond to Oprah Winfree, they are all hocking the diet mentality. How many of us have made a New Year's resolution to lose weight? Or set a goal to lose a few pounds?



Conscious eating breaks this cycle of yo-yo dieting, weight loss and gain. It strives to change our eating habits and create healthy eating habits moving forward for our lifetime. Western practitioners are beginning to see the benefits from changing eating habits for a lifetime, however, for diabetics these healthy changes come with a list of restrictive foods. Western medicine is focused on the symptom, high glucose, instead of the cause of this chronic disease. They treat your glucose level with pharmaceutical drugs to help lower the glucose and at the same time ask patients to reduce highly refined carbohydrates to get the numbers down. It's all about the numbers! As a diabetic we know that healthy eating and reduction of refined carbohydrates are important, but it is not the only way to sustain our lives. Let's scratch the diets, but continue to use the word diet in our vocabulary, only as Webster defines it: 'food and drink regularly consumed; habitual nourishment' (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diet>, n.d.). Our bodies depend on the diet we eat every day.

Diabetes

By all estimates, Diabetes has reached epidemic proportions today. Over 30 million individuals today have diabetes (type 1 or 2), and another 84 million have 'pre-diabetes' (CDC, 2017). Pre-diabetes is defined as an individual who has an elevated HbA1c over 5.7 but below 6.4). Most experts today agree that the leading cause of diabetes is related to our diet and sedentary lifestyle. Not the diet that restricts our intake to lose weight, but the diet that is related to 'what' we eat and 'why'. Although they have not specifically identified the genetic code, most agree there is a genetic disposition to the likelihood of getting diabetes. However, the preponderance of what we eat is moving the needle in the wrong direction. Is this disease curable? The jury is still out, but one thing is certain, for diabetics today, it requires a lot of hard work and changes to the way we eat. Regardless of whether you believe it is curable, or worth the sacrifice, we do know that it is manageable.

Glucose is what our bodies use for fuel. Glucose is the result of metabolic processes from what we eat. Not only for the visible outward energy that we display in our everyday activities, but the energy our bodies need for cell creation, brain activity and muscle use. It is the lifeblood of our bodies. We can store glucose for later use, and most everything we ingest eventually is metabolized into glucose to be either used for energy immediately, or stored for later use. Carbohydrates, both highly processed, and natural convert to this source of energy. Because refined carbohydrates have had most all of the good fiber and other macro and micronutrients stripped out during processing, it turns to glucose more quickly than those that are natural. Think of eating that raw or roasted beet, which in its natural state could have been processed into beet sugar, or eaten whole after roasting on a salad or as a side dish with our meal. The refined one converts to glucose in our system within 45 minutes of ingesting, whereas the whole beet food takes much longer.

Diabetes is not a disease created by too much sugar. In simple terms it is our bodies either lack of insulin production (as in Type 1), or our bodies inability to effectively use the insulin to help remove the glucose from our blood stream and store it away for later use. Therefore, it stands to reason that if you ingest less foods that contain refined sugar, or reduce intake of carbohydrates, your blood sugar values should go down. This monitoring by diabetics is constant, from the time you wake up until the time you go to bed. It can be exhausting and overwhelming at times. It can also be unpredictable. We could see a spike in blood sugar for no apparent reason, or drop to dangerous levels if we do not eat regularly while taking medications. Continuous glucose monitoring devices have made this task of monitoring



much more efficient, but can lead to added worry and concern because the numbers are always in front of us.

Conscious Eating and Diabetes

So how does mindful eating fit into this? If one reviews the principals of conscious eating it relies on the simple belief that one should not 'restrict or deprive' oneself from eating what you want. It is based on the concept that once 'not deprived' you will make the right decision for your health and body rather than submitting to the cravings of something you 'can't have'. Eating for the right reasons to nurture your body will lead your mind to the right decisions. And should you decide to eat that bowl of ice cream anyway, you can get back on the right track with the next meal or the next day. This at first glance appears to be in direct conflict with what we are taught by western practitioners regarding NOT eating those things that are inherently 'bad' for diabetics. If we've been diagnosed with diabetes, or pre-diabetes, we've all been given the 'bad list' of foods or the do's and don'ts of eating. So, if we all know that the huge piece of red velvet cake is not good for diabetics, why are we still tempted? Sugar can be just like a drug. It produces a 'high' and then you crash. This causes you to go back for more. However, it goes deeper than just cravings. Conscious eating principals subscribe to the belief that we simply because we know we can't have it. If we are being deprived or restricted, our mind will play tricks on us. And then once we do eat it, the emotions of what we have done kick in and we feel bad, depressed, and angry. Then the cycle starts all over again. A double whammy!

A word of caution here, common sense must prevail. With some chronic illnesses and allergies, some foods can make you deathly sick, or even kill you. For those who are in that situation you have to adhere to the 'forbidden' list. For others, like most diabetics, that piece of chocolate red velvet cake won't kill you, but it will dramatically raise our blood glucose exponentially. Is that a bad thing? Most definitely, but, under normal circumstances, your body will come back into balance. It can and should be alarming to us. After all, most of us spend every waking moment ruled by our finger pokes and the last reading we took. What if we look at this 'bad' list as simply recommendations rather than an edict to remove the guilt, anxiety, and emotions associated with it?

Conscious eating principals can be beneficial to Diabetics. It can bring awareness and consciousness to many things that relate to our eating habits, and what certain foods do to our bodies. We must embrace, not fear, the 'finger poke', or the latest reading from our continuous glucose monitor (CGM). Embrace the data set points. Use your data to assist in your decision making. A CEO would never make a product development and launch decision without solid demographic or production cost estimates, would they? Why would we not use the data tools available to us to decide what to eat?

Principals like stopping before a food choice and thinking about what/why this food choice is so appealing. Thinking about how it will make me feel after I eat it. Will I be satiated? Will my numbers rise? Will I eat beyond my fullness? It will also allow us to review alternatives that may be as satisfying or allow our 'sweet tooth' to be satisfied without consuming the whole dish.

OK, so I ate it...

Now what? First of all, stop the guilt, recognize that all is not lost. The next meal, the next day, or even the next hour is another opportunity to get back on the wagon to great health! It is just a single data point, and one of a thousand glucose readings you will take over the course of managing this disease. Then take a moment or two to reflect on how you felt before you ate the food, think about whether you



were 'full' or not, am I eating out of an emotional need? What did I feel after I ate the food? Did I feel satisfied, did the craving go away? Did I savor every bite? Note the serving size, compare it to something you have with you, cell phone, fist or fingers, etc. What did I eat with it, complex carbohydrates, protein, healthy fats?

All of the answers gathered here will go a long way in helping shape your decisions in the future when confronted with this food. Now crunch those numbers. Monitor what the food does to your glucose levels, write it down, 45 minutes, 1-1/2 hours, and 2 hours after consumption. Now process all the data and prepare yourself for the next time you are confronted with this food choice. What can I do differently?

- Eat in Combination - Research shows that food pairing is sometimes as important as what we eat. Eating healthy carbohydrates, protein and fats along with that highly refined carbohydrate will extend the time it takes for the glucose to make its way into our blood stream. In some cases, this combination eating can reduce the highs or spikes in our blood sugar.
- Eat a smaller serving – Sometimes just a bite or two will satisfy our taste buds and our cravings. Share with a friend if eating out. Try using a salad plate instead of a dinner plate to control serving sizes at home.
- Substitute Foods - Choose a different food for same effect. A bowl of fresh berries with whipped cream and shaved dark chocolate instead of that slice of red velvet cake. You may find your sweet tooth satisfied without the added sugar.

Be prepared for the next time based on what you have learned from processing the data. When confronted the next time with a food choice, stop, and think about the following:

- Am I full? Do I really want it? Why do I want it? Are there emotions associated with the food?
- If I eat it, how will I feel? Satisfied, guilty, angry?
- Would I be satisfied with just a few bites? Can I share?

Core principles of Conscious Eating

As I introduced in the beginning there are subtle differences between Conscious, Mindful, & Intuitive Eating. At their core they are all designed to bring awareness to your eating habits and instill lasting principles for you to follow in your day to day lives to bring about sustainable change. Here are the definitions of each followed by one set of principles for intuitive eating:

- Conscious Eating (Southwest Institute of Healing Arts, 2019) – An approach that teaches you how to create a healthy relationship with your food, mind and body where you ultimately become the expert of your own body and food choices.
- Mindful Eating (May, n.d.) - Mindful eating helps us become aware of our thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations related to eating, reconnecting us with our innate inner wisdom about hunger and satiety.
- Intuitive Eating (Rumsey, n.d.) - Intuitive eating is an approach to health and food that has nothing to do with diets, meal plans, discipline or willpower. It teaches you how to get in touch



with your body cues like hunger, fullness and satisfaction while learning to trust your body around food again.

In all of these programs the key is beginning to make choices in what you eat consciously, without judgement, and for the 'right' reasons. In the book, *Intuitive Eating – a Revolutionary Program that Works*, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch outline 10 principles for Intuitive Eating (Tribole & Resch, 2012). In this brief we have only scratched the surface of one or two of them.

- Reject the Diet Mentality
- Honor your Hunger
- Make Peace with Food
- Challenge the Diet Police
- Feel Your Fullness
- Discover the Satisfaction Factor
- Cope with your Emotions without using Food
- Respect your body
- Exercise - Feel the Difference
- Honor Health with Nutrition

I highly recommend taking a deeper look at these basic principles and seeing how, as diabetics, we might apply them to our daily lives. Even just one or two changes in our eating habits can have a profound affect on how we view ourselves, our bodies and the food we eat.

Summary

This journey to healthy and conscious eating will have many twists, turns and detours. Diabetics can benefit from breaking the diet cycle and eliminate the guilt associated with making food choices that others have deemed 'bad' for us. Through systematic processing of all the information available to us we can begin a healthy relationship with food and ourselves without all the guilt and emotions associated with what others are telling us, as helpful as it may be.

Eat fresh, eat colorfully, and enjoy the path you've chosen for your health and wellbeing. For further information on how you can incorporate easy, colorful plates into your diet please reach out to me at ray.orndorff@cookingandcolor.com.

Enjoy!



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