

## Eating Zen in 2010

For some people, eating can be a religious experience, but for most of us it is just a fact of daily life. We do it at least three times a day and put little thought into it most of the time. Each January, however, most people turn their attention to their diets and resolve to lose weight or eat better. They passionately count calories and log time spent at the gym. Unfortunately, more often than not those resolutions are largely forgotten or abandoned after a couple of months because they arose less from a true commitment to change than merely a temporary post-holiday feeling of guilt or test of willpower.

I urge you to try a different approach this year, a more mindful approach to eating that I like to call “Zen eating.” Focus on being “present” while you eat and respecting your body by feeding it nourishing foods that you enjoy, but only when you are truly physically hungry. This concept of “Zen eating” entails fostering awareness of your mental, emotional and physical states to guide you in making all of your eating choices.

As you learn to use your intuition to find your path to enlightened eating, you may improve your health and even lose weight in the process. There is evidence that practicing a more mindful style of eating can lead to a healthy weight and a lower risk of cardiovascular disease by regulating eating patterns, lowering calorie intake and decreasing the frequency of binges (in



people with binge-eating disorder). Some studies have also shown that practicing mindful eating improves insulin sensitivity, which helps to prevent fat storage and reduce the risk of diabetes. Although true Zen philosophy is not concerned about end results, there are many peripheral benefits to practicing Zen eating and I hope that you will reap them in the process of becoming more mindful of your diet.

### BABY, YOU KNEW

As the mother of a seven-month old baby, it has recently become abundantly clear to me just how innate eating is. Both hunger and satiety (feeling full) are instincts that we are born with, yet somehow as we grow up

being fed by adults, who for whatever reason are not able to be fully attentive to our eating cues, we lose touch with those natural instincts and lose the ability to regulate our true appetites. Babies not only know when and how much to eat, but studies have shown that when young children are offered a variety of foods, they will instinctively choose a combination that constitutes a healthful, balanced diet. To find our eating Zen, we must try to go back to early childhood and re-learn what we knew instinctively: what, when and how much to eat.

### THE ZEN OF WHAT

Knowing what to eat is the easiest part of eating Zenfully. At its core, Zen is about simplicity, so eating Zen means eating simply. I'm not advocating that you eat baby food for dinner, but you could take a cue from a baby's menu. The foundation of the healthful diet that you are striving to eat comprises minimally processed plant foods, namely vegetables, fruit, beans, legumes and whole grains. Complement these foundational plant foods with lean protein and healthful fats from extra virgin first cold pressed olive oil, nuts and fatty fish (which also serves as a good source of protein). Try to fill at least half of your plate with produce at all of your meals, with a lean protein, like beans, fish, poultry, eggs or yogurt making up a quarter of your plate and a whole-grain carbohydrate, like brown rice, oats, barley, quinoa, flourless sprouted whole-grain bread or a starchy vegetable comprising the remaining quarter.



Gelsons registered dietitian, Jessica Siegel, has a Masters in Public Health. However, she is not a doctor and her nutritional recommendations are not tailored to specific health problems. Consult your physician before beginning any nutritional program. To contact Jessica, please call her at 1-800-GELSONS.

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satiety so that you fill up sooner and stay full longer than when you eat highly processed foods or high carbohydrate foods on their own. Foods that don't come in packages (other than packages that only contain a single ingredient, like "oats") should make up the majority of your diet. High-quality minimally processed foods are more nutritious and more satisfying than processed foods, so if you are mindful and present while you eat these types of foods, you will generally be able to eat less as you recognize satiety sooner. By eating less food, you will naturally take in fewer calories and ultimately lose weight as a result.

#### ✔ Be prepared

Although eating Zen is about being in the moment, it is important to be prepared with healthful food choices when hunger strikes. Stock your refrigerator with nutritious foods that will support you in your eating strategy. Use my "Healthy Shopping List" handout to purchase healthful foods that you can either prepare at home or that require little to no preparation at all.

When you eat at a restaurant, try to choose simply prepared items and make substitutions so that half of your plate is filled with vegetables. If the portions are large (and they almost always are at

restaurants), take half of your meal home or share it with a fellow diner. Eating right is never about willpower; it is about understanding what healthful foods are and having a strategy for eating them. If you tend to rely on food to medicate your emotions, then having a strategy for using non-food solutions to emotional issues is an important part of practicing Zen eating.

#### ✔ Connect with your food

Have you ever thought about why you eat what you do, or why you like certain foods and not others? There are many hidden cues that influence our eating—things that range from advertising to extra-large portions to the size of our plates. These factors can stimulate you to eat when you're not hungry or encourage you to overeat when you've already had enough. Connecting profoundly with your food, developing a deeper appreciation of it and understanding what draws you to it is an important tool that can help you in your Zen approach to eating. In order to truly savor your food, use your five senses: you need to look, touch, smell, taste and listen. To fully appreciate the power and depth of eating Zen, try the following exercise alone or with others (if you want to discuss your experience afterwards):

Before you eat, make sure there are no distractions, so that you can devote your attention to your eating experience for the next 30 minutes.

Place a plate with two or three of your favorite foods in front of you. It is better if the foods require little preparation and can be picked up with your hands. A piece of cheese, some dark chocolate and a strawberry are all diverse and simple foods that would work well. Close your eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths to help clear your mind.

Open your eyes and look at your food. Take in the colors, textures, shapes and arrangement on your plate. Without judging your thoughts, ask yourself what pleases you about the appearance of the food. Choose a piece of food to examine first. Pick up a piece with your hands

and use your sense of touch to feel its temperature, texture, weight and density.

Bring the food under your nose, as though you are going to put it in your mouth. Close your eyes. Smell the different aromas. Do you smell just the food or things in your environment too? Try to imagine what the food tastes like based on the way it smells.

Keeping your eyes closed, take a bite. What do you notice first? The temperature, taste, texture or sound? Begin to chew and taste. Try to identify the different flavors that are rolling around on your tongue. Take another bite and listen to the sounds you make as you chew. Take a third bite and as you chew, see if you can notice the subtle transition from chewing to swallowing. After you swallow, notice the amount of time it takes before you no longer feel any food is in your mouth. Repeat with the remaining foods on your plate.

This exercise should bring an awareness of just how fully we can be physically and mentally engaged with our eating. Using all of your senses can help you realize new things that you like or dislike about a food and it can help bring much more sensual satisfaction to your eating experience. Try to do an abbreviated version of this exercise with your first bite of every meal to help establish your intention to have a Zen eating experience.

## THE ZEN OF WHEN AND HOW MUCH

Knowing intuitively when and how much to eat is difficult. How do you learn to recognizing when you are truly hungry and when you are satisfied? It's really about being present and not distracted while you eat, so that you can eat according to the needs of your body rather than your emotions.

### ✓ Rate your hunger and satiety

Tuning into your body while you eat is the key to eating the right amount of food—not too little and not too much. Begin to use the hunger scale to rate your hunger and satiety. The scale ranges from 1 to 5, where 1=very hungry, 2=somewhat hungry, 3=comfortable, 4=comfortably full and 5=very full. Every time you're about to eat, rate your hunger. The goal should be

to always stay between a 2 and a 4, without going to either extreme. If you eat when you're a 1, then you've waited too long to evaluate your hunger. If you eat when you're a 3 or a 4 or a 5, then you're practicing mindless eating. The purpose of the hunger scale is to help get you back in touch with your physical hunger rather than your emotional hunger. Combine the hunger scale with some mindfulness to help you start listening to your body. Eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full. Learn to dislike the physical feeling of over-feeding yourself. Remember that it takes about 20 minutes for your stomach to let your brain know that you are full, so eat slowly enough to recognize when you are comfortably full.

### ✓ Stay present

Part of practicing Zen eating is being present in this moment and not thinking about the future. Don't think about the next thing you will eat before you have finished eating what you are eating. That is how people end up eating more than they'd like without ever tasting anything. Try to stay present and enjoy what you are eating at this moment and then check in with yourself to see if you need more or if you are satisfied.

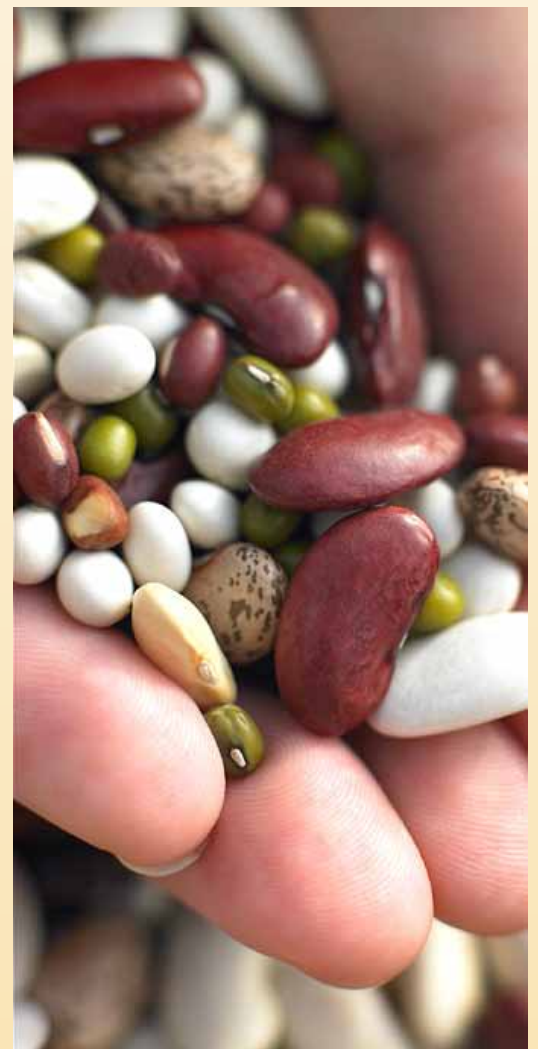
### ✓ Give thanks

Honoring yourself and your food should be a part of your meals. Giving thanks can be saying grace, or it can be a process through which you take a moment to recognize where your food comes from, the elements of the earth or the ingredients that went into its creation, the nourishment that it will offer your body, and the person (perhaps it's you) who put his or her time and love into preparing your meal. Through this act, I hope that you begin to respect and listen to your body's needs and attempt to put only the highest quality, most thoughtfully prepared foods into it.

Appreciating the positive attributes of your food can help you to let go of negative feelings and judgments that you may hold about certain foods and bring more acceptance of your choices. When you practice eating Zen, you will enjoy all of your food, including the highly processed nutrient-poor foods, which may be an especially good thing. If you choose to eat a slice of cake or a piece of pizza, you will be able to enjoy every bite rather than

passing judgment and feeling guilty or out of control. By bringing gratitude into your meals, you set the stage for a mindful, non-judgmental experience that allows you to appreciate all aspects of your food.

When practicing Zen eating, you are choosing to enjoy the direct experiences of food and eating. You don't have to have an eating disorder to have a dysfunctional relationship with food; most people experience at least a small amount of turmoil when it comes to eating and choosing healthful foods. However, you can transform your relationship with food and bring enjoyment back to eating. Master the art of eating Zen in 2010 by slowing down, listening to and respecting your body, showing gratitude towards your food, savoring the eating experience and choosing to put only the best quality foods into your body. I hope this will finally be the year that you stop dieting and start living.



## Food of the Month: Chocolate



Who says healthy food doesn't taste good? Dark chocolate, naturally packed with antioxidants and fiber, is a superfood! It's a dream come true for most of us to be able to enjoy our favorite food and reap health benefits at the same time. The only caveats are that you must eat a certain type and a limited quantity if chocolate is going to be a healthful part of your diet.

Cocoa, the main ingredient in chocolate, contains many of the same phytonutrients found in red wine and tea. Polyphenols are a group of powerful antioxidants, which are believed to inhibit cancer tumor growth, increase HDL (good) cholesterol, and reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol oxidation (LDL oxidation can lead to atherosclerosis). Flavonoids in the polyphenol family, which are present in cocoa, not only have antioxidant powers, they also seem to fight inflammation, help lower blood pressure and act like aspirin to reduce blood clotting. Unsweetened cocoa powder and dark chocolate have the most antioxidant powers, with antioxidant levels higher than fruits such as prunes and strawberries. Catechins, the powerful antioxidants found in tea, seem to be even more abundant in

chocolate. Catechins may help reduce the risk of developing skin, esophageal and stomach cancers. Like cranberries, chocolate and cocoa also contain tannins, which can help keep the urinary tract healthy and reduce cardiovascular disease risk.

Like many other plant foods, chocolate contains fair amounts of magnesium and iron. It also contains calories and fat. One ounce of dark chocolate has about 135 calories, 8 grams of fat, 5 grams of saturated fat, and 2 grams of fiber, though these numbers can vary widely among brands and cocoa percentages. One ounce of cocoa powder (about 5 tablespoons) has 60 calories, 4 grams of fat, 2 grams of saturated fat, and 9 grams of fiber. The calories can fit into your diet if you eat your chocolate in moderation—say half an ounce a day, but how can we justify all that saturated fat? Most of it is in the form of stearic acid, which has been shown to have little to no effect on blood cholesterol.

When you choose your chocolate, go for the high quality dark chocolate, like *Green & Black's Organic*, *Valrhona* and *Scharffen Berger*, since milk chocolate contains butterfat that can raise bad cholesterol levels, and many of the lower quality chocolate products have had their beneficial cocoa butter replaced by unhealthy partially hydrogenated fats and palm oils. Some brands of chocolate list the percentage of cocoa or cacao, which refers to the combined percentage of cocoa solids and cocoa butter in the product, with a higher percentage connoting a more bittersweet than sweet flavor and possibly a higher antioxidant content. Aim to eat chocolate with at least 60% cocoa since the higher the cocoa mass, the less sugar and more fiber there tends to be. Semisweet chocolate chips also fall into the dark category, and cocoa powder is always a great choice, since it is minimally processed and unsweetened. As with any packaged food, look for chocolates that list the fewest and purest ingredients, such as cocoa butter, chocolate liquor, sugar and vanilla.

Although it may feel as though chocolate is addictive, research indicates that it is not. Chocolate has a flavor and texture that is unlike any other food, and our brains produce endorphins when we eat it, which keeps us coming back for more.

### Jessica's Store Appearances Body Fat Testing

Jessica will be offering complimentary body fat testing and answering your questions about weight loss, food and nutrition. For more information, please visit [www.gelsons.com](http://www.gelsons.com).

#### Friday, January 8

Century City 12:00pm

#### Saturday, January 9

Dana Point 10:00am

Irvine 1:30pm

Newport Beach 4:00pm

#### Monday, January 11

Valley Village/North Hollywood 12:00pm

#### Wednesday, January 13

Calabasas 12:00pm

#### Friday, January 15

West Hollywood 12:00pm

#### Tuesday, January 19

Pasadena 12:00pm

Silver Lake/Los Feliz 4:00pm

#### Thursday, January 21

Hollywood 4:00pm

#### Friday, January 22

Encino 12:00pm

Sherman Oaks 4:00pm

#### Monday, January 25

Santa Barbara 12:00pm

Westlake Village 4:00pm

#### Tuesday, January 26

Pacific Palisades 4:00pm

#### Thursday, January 28

Marina del Rey 4:30pm

#### Friday, January 29

Tarzana 9:30am

Northridge 12:00pm

Testing method is Bioelectrical Impedance and is not appropriate for people with pacemakers or osteoporosis, pregnant women or children. Be well-hydrated for most accurate results.