

# Mindful Eating: Mindful Interventions for Adolescents

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## Introduction

Adults with disabilities are three times more likely than those without a disability to experience heart disease, stroke, diabetes, or cancer (CDC, 2020). Unfortunately, there is little being done to combat this and to increase the health of those with disabilities.

Often the blame for increased chronic disease risk gets put on obesity rates within this community, but when looking at the bigger picture there are many other factors. One factor is that individuals with special healthcare needs are even more at risk to develop nutrition related chronic diseases due to lack of inclusion and access to nutrition and physical activity education programs as preventative measures. While the dieting approach is what most healthcare providers prescribe to better one's health, it is unsustainable and does not teach lifelong habits like an inclusive nutrition program.

A sustainable and inclusive program to teach individuals with developmental disabilities lifelong habits to better their health is needed for this community. Mindful eating using the Health at Every Size (HAES) paradigm is proposed to teach individuals with disabilities how to curate a nutritious environment in their own lives. The HAES paradigm will be introduced over 4 weekly sessions to 4 to 6 adolescents with developmental disabilities and their parents pending final IRB approval.

## Mindful Eating Overview

Mindful eating is an approach to food which focuses on an individual's awareness of food and their experiences with food (Association for Size, Diversity, and Health, 2020). The Health at Every Size initiative is weight inclusive, promoting all body shapes and sizes and rejects the idea of weight-stigmatizing. It focuses on health enhancement to improve and equalize access to services and information.

HAES promotes individual eating based on physiological needs rather than generalizing a diet. By acknowledging that weight stigma and discrimination may fall into categories of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, and status, inclusion becomes a primary factor of the HAES paradigm (AFSDH, 2020). The HAES approach to mindful eating is a more sustainable way to promote health rather than being prescribed a diet.

Intuitive or mindful eating is based on internal hunger and satiety cues rather than consumption of food based on emotion or situational cues. The premise of mindful eating is for individuals to learn how to be in tune with their bodies' innate signals for hunger and fullness (Moy et al., 2013). When intuitive eating is executed correctly, individuals generally consume more nutritious foods and can maintain a healthier weight (Moy et al., 2013).

## Parent/Caregiver Involvement



Parent inclusion in mindful eating programs would result in parent's reinforcing the information given to the children and allow them to learn mindful attitudes alongside their children (Lopez-Alarcon, 2020).

By teaching caregivers alongside their children, a mindfulness-based approach to food, we may limit the adverse effects of dieting and parental control of food. Parents should promote an unconditional permission to eat, eating for physical reasons rather than emotion, and reliance on hunger and satiety cues in children.

## Analysis

Pre and post questionnaires based on Tylka's Intuitive Eating Scale will be administered to participants. Questions will be reformatted to analyze if the individual is eating for physical rather than emotional reasons and to address reliance on hunger and fullness cues. Sleep will also be considered an important factor. Behavioral changes will be measured throughout the educational sessions.

## Intervention Design

**Session 1:  
Mindful Munching**  
Distractions during meal times  
Portion control  
Sleep



**Session 2:  
Sensational Senses**  
All 5 senses  
How food makes us feel



**Session 3:  
Understanding  
Hunger and Fullness  
Cues**  
What does it look like  
How can we tell



**Session 4:  
Emotions**  
Body positivity  
Purpose of food