

# FOOD *for* THOUGHT

SUMMER 2014

## *The Magic of* **Taste**

Eating  
for quality,  
not quantity

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## About The Center for Mindful Eating:

### Our Mission:

The mission of The Center for Mindful Eating, also known as TCME, is to help people achieve a balanced, respectful, healthy and joyful relationship with food and eating. By providing an easily accessible source of information and opportunities to interact via the web and in other ways, we seek to train and encourage professionals who can then foster this capacity in others.

### Board Members:

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## Board Members Corner

### Welcomes and Rejoicings

Did you know that TCME is growing into an international community? Last year, The Center for Mindful Eating board welcomed Caroline Baerten, RD, of Belgium. She has been followed by Lilia Graue, MD, of Mexico; Barbara Reid, PhD, of England; and most recently, Cinzia Pezzolesi, PhD, of Italy, who is currently living in England.

These new board members represent a growing desire to develop mindful eating resources and communities all over the globe. In addition to these four international board members, we are delighted to welcome Shirley Kessel from the Philadelphia area

in the United States!

The TCME board will be coming together for the Annual Retreat in July. As we welcome our new board members, we'll be saying goodbye to Jean Kristeller, Char Wilkins and Jan Chozen Bays. Jean and Char have been part of the center since its inception in 2005; Jan joined in 2007.

A wonderful practice of mindfulness is celebrating or rejoicing in the merits of others. We asked Cheryl Wasserman and Megrette Fletcher to share a few words about their colleagues Jean, Char and Jan as we wish them well in their mindful eating journeys.



**“Jan Chozen Bays** called me up one afternoon in the fall of 2007 and asked if we could talk. She introduced herself as someone who was writing a book called *Mindful Eating* and wanted to learn more about The Center for Mindful Eating. In the nine years since that phone call, Jan Chozen Bays has served six years on the board. Her steady presence has been a wonderful influence at the center, seeing us over the typical challenges that happen to all new and growing organizations. Jan has added humor, kindness, and best of all, a calmness that has allowed The Center for Mindful Eating to thrive.” ~ *Megrette Fletcher*



“The first time we met, it was gathered around a kitchen table at a Buddhist center in New Hampshire. I didn’t really understand her work, her passion, her deep commitment to help people change how they see food and eating. At that kitchen table, **Jean Kristeller** passionately declared: ‘I think it is time for there to be a Center for Mindful Eating.’ Her pioneering spirit and leadership were what TCME.org needed to move from an idea to an international nonprofit organization reaching almost 100,000 people annually.” ~ *Megrette Fletcher*



“Since becoming a TCME board member last year, I have had the honor to be mentored by **Char Wilkins**. I have been touched by her patience, her sense of humor, her organizational skills, and her ability to set clear limits. Char’s vision and spirit have shaped the organization from the first meeting in 2005 when TCME.org began. She has served as Vice President, President, overseen the publication of Food for Thought, work on developing the teleconference schedule and has organized all of our Annual Meetings. Her attention to detail is only surpassed by her compassion and commitment to mindfulness.” ~ *Cheryl Wasserman*

# SATISFIED

## The Power of Taste Awareness



**Jean Kristeller**

*PhD*

Our body sends us multiple signals that tell us we may have eaten enough. The very quickest feedback is from our taste buds. Most of us know the basics of how taste buds function, but most people don't appreciate how quickly they adapt to even a few bites of food. Taste buds are the ends of nerves on our tongue that connect fairly directly to the brain. Five major types of taste buds have been identified: sweet, sour, bitter, salty, and *umami*, which was discovered most recently and is sensitive to "protein" experiences (*umami* is the Japanese word for savory food or protein).

It was once thought that the taste buds congregate in different areas of the tongue, but it is now known that they are spread out much more evenly. We also know that there are enormous individual differences in the number of taste buds, which contribute to variations in people's preferences for foods. Some people ("super tasters") have 100 times the number of taste buds as others; somewhat

paradoxically, individuals with a high number of taste buds tend to be "picky eaters" since many foods may taste too intense.

Substantial research has shown that taste buds begin to habituate fairly quickly to foods as they are eaten. This happens somewhat more slowly if we are hungrier and faster if not. This process is technically referred to in the research literature as one aspect of "sensory specific satiety." Since we are concerning ourselves with only one sense – taste – I prefer to use the term "taste specific satiety," or just "taste satiety."

The initial stage of taste satiety can happen quite quickly, sometimes after only a few bites. More complex tastes or higher-quality (gourmet) foods may retain this pleasure factor or "taste satisfaction" longer. But at the point when the taste buds tire, if we are paying attention, the food no longer tastes quite as good and does not give as much pleasure. At a certain point, the taste buds almost stop registering the taste of food at all – we may be experiencing only our memories of those first few bites in combination with memories of the food from the past. If we continue eating, we may be "chasing the flavor" by eating more and more.

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## taste awareness

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In laboratory experiments, individuals with eating disorders or who are defined as being obese are generally less sensitive to this process. This has been interpreted as indicating that obesity or eating disorders may be caused by a deficit in the ability to taste or in the ability to experience satiety. In my experience, however, it is a deficit in paying attention to taste that creates problems, and paying attention can be easily relearned.

One of the most widely used mindfulness experiences, developed for the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, is slowly eating three raisins. As each raisin is eaten, you become aware of the subtleties of taste that emerge – the second raisin may taste different from the first, and the third may start to lose its appeal. Some individuals become aware they don't even like raisins, when they previously had eaten them by the handful.

Taste satiety will vary with the food. More complex foods may retain their pleasure factor for longer because more taste buds are involved. This is one reason gourmet-type foods are more satisfying. In the MB-EAT program, we gradually introduced more complex and even challenging foods, beginning with raisins, moving to cheese and crackers, cookies, corn chips, chocolate and then to the wide variety of food that people have in their usual meals and snacks. During the course of the program, people are surprised by their increased sensitivity to taste – and to how quickly the pleasure of the first few bites diminishes. They begin to realize that they truly can eat for “quality, not quantity,” and that doing so doesn't need to be a struggle nor need it trigger a sense of deprivation. People are often shocked to find out that they are quite willing – and able – to eat only a few bites of the food they used to binge on,



savoring their food more and awakening their “inner gourmet.” When they truly pay attention, they may also find that certain foods they thought they liked very much are unpleasantly sweet or salty, or lacking much underlying flavor. Even individuals without particular issues with overeating often find that they can become more attuned to the pleasure of tasting those first few bites.

One of the most challenging ways to experiment with this newfound appreciation of “taste satiety” and “taste satisfaction” is to go to an all-you-can-eat buffet. People we work with often either avoid eating in such places or go to them because they will “get their money’s worth” but always overeat. But a buffet is an ideal place to practice “micro-eating” – having a few bites of something, leaving it if it doesn't taste so good, and going back for a little more of the highest-quality flavors.

Tuning in to taste awareness is

a core component of mindful eating, perhaps one of the most important components. Not only does it bring back joy and pleasure to the experience of eating instead of guilt and fear, but it also gives people a sense of power. People who eat mindfully rather than

mindlessly are tuning in to their own experience and satisfaction, cultivating their “inner gourmet” and eating for quality instead of quantity.

*Jean Kristeller, PhD, is professor emeritus of psychology at Indiana State University and the cofounder of TCME. She has spent her career researching*

*mindfulness and mindful eating. She developed the Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training (MB-EAT) program, which has been shown to be effective for treating patterns of overeating in multiple NIH-funded clinical trials.*

**People are often shocked to find out that they are quite willing – and able – to eat only a few bites of the food they used to binge on, savoring their food more and awakening their “inner gourmet.”**

# Tuning In To Taste: The Case for Becoming a Foodie



**Marsha Hudnall**  
MS, RD, CD

The idea of becoming a foodie – someone who ardently enjoys food – strikes fear in the hearts of many people. After all, if we enjoy food too much, we will probably eat too much, and that’s not good for us, right?

Not so fast. The fact is, when we begin to truly appreciate the flavors of foods, it makes us more particular about what we will eat. That can mean great things for what we consume on a regular basis and subsequently our health.

## A Foodie’s Approach to Eating Well

Mindfulness is at the core of a foodie’s approach to eating well.

**A foodie savors as she eats.** She’s not reading, working or doing something else when she eats. She’s eating – and tuning in to how each bite tastes, smells, feels. When the pleasure starts to drop off – the food just doesn’t taste as good anymore – that’s when she knows she’s starting to become satisfied. This, by the way, is part of the body’s natural system that guides eating for well-being.

**A foodie pays attention to the quality of food,** such as how it is prepared, the degree of processing, and whether it is produced sustainably, all factors that can significantly affect the taste of food.

**A foodie eats a variety of foods.** When we eat mindfully, we are aware when our taste buds become “bored” with what we are eating; such boredom leads to a lack of satisfaction and the potential for eating more than we need to make

up for that lack. A variety of foods keeps things interesting. The bonus for health is that variety also helps supply the many different nutrients needed for good health.

**A foodie invests the time to get the foods she wants to eat...** and does it joyfully because she values the taste reward the effort brings. This includes shopping and preparation as well as going to a great restaurant for that special dish she can’t duplicate at home.

Mindfulness is at the core of a foodie’s approach to eating well.

## Experimenting at the Buffet

“All-you-can-eat” buffets provide an ideal setting for a person to experiment with tuning in to taste and beginning to use that as a guidepost for what to eat. Instead of being places to fear, buffets actually present opportunities for discovering what truly tastes good to you and practicing eating it in a way that leaves you feeling well. Of course, buffets differ in their quality, but even then, eating at a lower-quality buffet can be an exercise in choosing to eat only foods that meet your taste standards and leaving the rest. At a higher-quality buffet, where you discover you enjoy just about everything served, you could focus on finding that point at which your enjoyment begins to fade, signaling you are becoming satisfied and may want to stop eating soon.

## Try these steps:

1. Before going up to the buffet, think about the types of food that appeal to you right now.
2. Then, before taking anything from the buffet, walk around it, looking

at your choices and deciding what appeals most. If you try this experiment several times, consider how hungry you are each time and how that seems to affect your food choices. Moderate hunger sharpens the senses and can actually make you more particular about what you eat.

3. Get your plate, then take small portions of everything you would like to try.
4. Sit down and begin to eat slowly, tuning in to the taste, smell and texture of each bite. Is it something you like? If not, leave it. You don’t have to eat it because it is on your plate.
5. Continue tasting each food you selected, savoring what you enjoy, stopping when the satisfaction from the taste starts to drop.
6. When you are finished with what you have selected, consider whether you are satisfied and how full you feel. If you decide you need more, repeat these steps.

Compare this process with the typical buffet scenario of overeating, often consuming foods you really don’t enjoy. In this way, you can leave the buffet comfortably full, satisfied and ready to enjoy the rest of your day.

## Bon appetit!

*Marsha Hudnall, MS, RD, CD, is president and co-owner of Green Mountain at Fox Run, a pioneering non-diet residential center in Vermont for women who struggle with overeating and weight, where she has been teaching mindful eating for over 25 years. She serves on the TCME board.*

### Introducing TCME Board Member Lilia Graue

Lilia Graue joined the TCME board in December 2013. A physician, psychotherapist and medical educator, Lilia specializes in working with individuals and families struggling with eating and mood disorders. She has founded Mindful Eating Mexico, with the mission of introducing mindful eating in Mexico. She aspires to build a network of health practitioners committed to fostering health and well-being through mindfulness.

Lilia has been practicing Vipassana meditation for 15 years within the context of the Theravada Buddhist tradition. She recently has completed several mindfulness training programs, including an MBSR course in Mexico and MBCT, along with two professional trainings applying mindfulness to eating: MB-EAT and Mindful Eating Conscious Living (MECL).

As a faculty member in the School of Medicine, UNAM, she is passionate about introducing mindfulness to medical students and educators through seminars with



international guests and MBSR workshops. She has taught mindfulness to a group of medical students with academic difficulties, as well as to a group of faculty members at the Faculty of Medicine.

Fully bilingual, Lilia has started translating our TCME Resources, including the TCME Principles and our Food for Thought newsletters. We'd like to publicly thank Lilia for helping to make our Mindful Eating Resources available to a larger portion of our worldwide community.

### TCME Resources for Spanish Speakers - Recursos en Español

We are pleased to announce that we've started building a collection of Spanish TCME Mindful Eating Resources - Recursos

en Español (<http://www.thecenterformindfuleating.org/RecursosEspañol>). Here you'll find our most recent Food for Thought on the theme "What is Mindful Eating," the Principles of Mindful Eating written by members of TCME, and more. We plan to publish our Food for Thought newsletter in Spanish every quarter, as well as a number of our Graphical Quotes, which can be used in your presentations and displayed in your professional spaces. We're working on our Professional Handouts this summer, which will become available to TCME members as soon as they are ready!

### Mindful Eating Research Tool

How well do you know the mindful eating research literature? What

journal recently published a Systematic Review on a mindfulness meditation intervention for disordered eating? What study recently concluded that increasing mindful eating may support lasting reductions in the consumption of sweets?

Learn the answer to these and other questions you may have about mindful eating with our new TCME resource guide to conducting research:

**Mindful Eating in the Scholarly Literature** (<http://www.thecenterformindfuleating.org/bibliography>)

Developed by a professional medical librarian, this tool is a helpful starting point for learning about the journals and bibliographic databases that provide access to mindful eating articles and research. We have also provided tips for searching PubMed and links to mindful eating searches in PubMed. Check out tip #5 and sign up to receive monthly email updates on new research from PubMed.

Thank you to member Penney Kirby for developing this tool to share with our community!

*More great news and updates from the [TCME blog](#)*

# From the Taste of Food to the Foods of Our Memories



**Caroline Baerten**

RD

It's commonly said that there's no accounting for taste. But what is taste?

The fact is, the tastes we experience when we take a bite of food are dependent on the food (external input) as well as how we perceive the taste (our sensory experience). So the question becomes: How do we really taste food? Is it through the taste buds, the nose, the eyes, or ... the memory?

For example, when chocolate comes in contact with our taste buds, we experience sweet-bitter tastes, and it may recall the chocolate treats of childhood. But when we taste the salty *umami* flavors of soy sauce, this is likely a simpler experience, with fewer memories but enhanced tremendously by the foods it accompanies, whether an egg roll or a piece of sushi.

## The basics of taste

Thanks to an ingenious network of over 10,000 taste buds on average, we are able to savor a multitude of taste variations. This is provided, of course, that we are conscious and aware of what happens in the mouth with every bite we take.

The primary tastes are experienced *on the tongue*, which has five taste receptors (sweet, sour, salty, bitter and *umami*).

To get the full experience of taste, however, we also have to perceive secondary tastes.

While eating, a lot of food

molecules enter through the back of the mouth *into the nose*. It is in this hidden, simultaneous process in which the nose plays an important role.

When we have a cold, we know this is true. How would a strawberry taste if you lost the ability to smell intensely the sweet flavors? Would this fruit "taste" as delicious?

Do we also "taste" with our eyes or really only with the taste buds and the nose? Is this appealing tomato in winter really full of taste or are we misled by the beautiful red color and round shape? When we see a tomato, the brain is able to imagine how this food might taste by *reactivating memories* of delicious tomatoes. The brain can then decide based on these memories whether we will eat it.

So we can ask ourselves whether we are really experiencing the taste of the tomatoes on our plate or eating only those good memories? Mindful eating, with a moment-to-moment focus on taste, appears to strengthen the immediate experience over what might be expected from our memories.

When no longer eating on automatic pilot, we might also realize that a milk chocolate candy bar that evokes childhood memories isn't at all as satisfying as a smaller piece of gourmet dark chocolate or that a cookie isn't as full of taste as we expected; realizing this quickly might help us from eating "too much."

Other aspects of eating also contribute to our experience and level of enjoyment. There's the sensory difference between the crispiness of French fries and the velvety mouth-filling sensation of creamy mashed

potatoes. This is the *tactile dimension* that comes into play when we taste foods. We're also able to experience taste differences in hot and cold dishes, the sensations of mint (menthol) that give an impression of refreshment, or the sharp heat of chilies.

## What do our sensory experiences really tell us?

How can we rely on the senses for choosing quality food that is, full of flavor, and at the same time takes good care of the body? Becoming aware of all sensory sensations is the first important step. By practicing mindfulness and living as much as possible in the present moment, we will taste food in another way. We can explore how bringing attention to the taste experience reveals new aspects of a favorite food and can transform our experience of it. The cultivation of a beginner's mind and an open, curious attitude of "not knowing" are the key in this exploration process. Tasting food in this way also keeps us from overeating "comfort" foods that trigger good memories, but may not really have quality flavors.

Slowly savoring food is a fascinating, joyful experience that provides insight and inner wisdom at the same time.

*Caroline Baerten, RD, (Belgium) is a mindfulness-based dietitian/RD, qualified chef and integrative psychotherapist (i.t) specializing in work with disturbed eating behavior, weight issues and sustainability. She is a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) trainee with the Center for Mindfulness, UMass Medical School (USA). She serves on the TCME board.*

[www.me-nu.org](http://www.me-nu.org)

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# COMMUNITY SHARING:

We asked members of our community a few questions to reflect on the role of taste in their experience of mindful eating. Here is what they had to say:

## What senses do you engage when tasting food?

“The joy of presentation is really important to me. I love the colors and aesthetic possibilities of food - it seems to enhance the taste!”  
~ *Rachelle Choueiri*

“Smell, hearing (I listen to the sound of biting down on the food), tasting, texture, imagination (source of all the ingredients), area of the tongue (sweet, sour, salty).”

## Is curiosity about the taste of food a factor in mindfulness? How so?

“More anticipation than curiosity, I would say...By being so present in the moment while eating, I find that I’m creating a stronger “meal memory” that I can draw on a little later in the day, and still feel the satisfaction and enjoyment of the senses that I originally felt during that meal, and it’s satisfying to my body all over again.”  
~ *Mike Gaston*

“It teaches many things on a moment-to-moment basis, e.g. that each nut in a handful tastes differently.”

“Yes, sometimes need to look at an old favorite food with new curiosity. I had a client who “loved” Pringles chips but when eaten slowly, mindfully, she realized she was just after the salt and didn’t really like them after all!”  
~ *Sarah, RDN, Madison WI*



## How do you reflect on the experience of taste, texture and flavors in your mindful eating practice?

“I try to identify the individual flavors in the food.”  
~ *Elizabeth Peters, MBA*

“I like to think about how taste, texture and flavors make food a deep sensory experience elevating eating to more than just the process of refueling. I also like to reflect on the work of the cook in combining these aspects in a dish skillfully and express my gratitude to them in each bite.” ~ *Rachelle Choueiri*

“I first relax into the bite, much like mindful breathing in yoga. I look at the food as I bring it close, close my eyes, smell the aromas, and remind myself to chew slowly and completely. If I do it right, I can feel a physical rush down my spine as I breathe during the chewing.”  
~ *Mike Gaston*



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