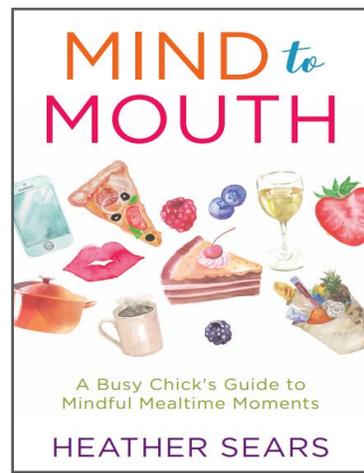


# MIND *to* MOUTH

## A Busy Chick's Guide to Mindful Mealtime Moments



### **Introduction: Too Busy to Swallow**

Growing up, I could often be found sitting barefoot at the family table, long hair uncombed, eating fresh, homemade yogurt. My mom grew alfalfa sprouts on the counter. The tomatoes and cucumbers came from the garden. And we regularly visited the health food co-op for bulk grains and carob treats. This was way before it was trendy—back when chia seeds were used in chia pets, not puddings. My mom was a beautiful mix of earthy artist and self-educated sophistication, and she taught me what it meant to nourish myself with real food.

Her influence led me to other forms of nourishment too. In a moment of curiosity one day while I was in high school, I picked up one of my mom's books about meditation. I started attending weekly meditation sessions with her and developed a daily practice of my own, which helped calm my turbulent teenage thoughts and moody emotions. In those early years, I was training my attention and cultivating inner stillness late into the night.

Fast forward to today. I'm now an urban mom who works in the always-on world of digital media. Life seems to have gotten progressively denser: multichannel work demands, childcare and mommy duties, household management, trying to squeeze in a workout (often unsuccessfully), planning and prepping every meal. Rinse. Repeat. Repeat.

The modern treadmill.

For years, I rushed through day after day as I tried to check every item off my growing to-do list. This pace sped up when I was working from home with my son in preschool, intensely multitasking to get work finished before pick-up time. And then I started choking.

I would be triple-tasking as usual while eating my lunch at the counter or even while walking to the table. The food would get caught in my throat and just not go down. I would have to sit very still for what felt like an eternity, hacking away, waiting for my throat to clear so I could swallow.

This happened repeatedly. At the same time, I was making progressively less healthy, more impulsive and convenient food choices for my family and myself, serving a diet of microwaved mush and takeout.

I'm part country girl—tied to the land, drawn to farm-fresh food and home cooking—and part city chick, happy to embrace tech and packaged time-savers that help me get it all done. But

the woes of modern life had taken over; I felt like I'd lost a part of myself. I didn't feel like me. While I still valued and craved nourishing, delicious mealtime experiences, I was focused on getting each gotta-do done and had lost the sparks of inspiration that in the past drove the creation of meals filled with flavor, warmth, and contentment: the food that restored and revived me. I was cooking and eating but not at all satisfied.

This had become a pattern, and something had to change. While I wanted to blame someone or something else, namely my cats for not intervening when they saw me making poor choices, I realized that what I needed to change was me. So, what exactly was going on here? I knew how to make healthy food choices. My mom had given me many lessons about reading food labels: that's why only the best chocolate will do! I knew how to cook, from time spent in the family kitchen and in more formal culinary school classes, and I enjoyed it. I also loved food. I'd tasted my way around the globe, and had taken over 30 food-focused trips to France, Italy, and Switzerland. With all this attention to the subject, I *thought* I was self-aware. But I was doing none of the things I knew to do.

So, I started observing and asking questions. I watched my head and heart and behavior in the context of mealtimes and I began researching. I looked into societal trends, our eating environment, and food marketing.

I harkened back to my university days as an Asian Studies major and dug into ancient books about meditation and mindfulness; reviewed food psychology and gastrophysics research; and interviewed corporate executives, chefs, and mindfulness experts. I tapped into my professional marketing knowledge and existing meditation practice. I drank a lot of wine and coffee while discussing the topic with girlfriends. They were facing similar challenges.

This book shares my journey—my struggles and my questions, my discoveries, and the solution that worked for me, one based on ancient wisdom combined with modern data, and grounded in fun, practical ideas for how you can apply it within your active life. Let's face it: our lives don't slow down just because we start choking or need to lose weight or want more zen during dinnertime. But as busy as we are, we can still make changes that allow us to start nourishing ourselves again, or maybe even for the first time.

And I've learned that it begins with being mindful.

Mindfulness brings so many benefits, and it's simple once we know how to do it and start to notice differences, pay attention to new things, and get interested in what's around us. In the pages ahead, I'll give you tips on how to do this, and share interesting data about environmental triggers, mental blind spots, and contextual influences, all of which will help you start noticing things you may have overlooked before. This will help you begin to create great meals with intention.

After reading, practicing, and journaling your way through this book, you will have a working knowledge of mindfulness and a simple practice to get you started; you will be more aware of and equipped to respond to the forces you are up against on your mealtime journey; and you will have a deeper appreciation for yourself and your innate ability to create any mealtime outcome you desire. That's what I experienced, and what I hope for you. This exploration has been a gift, and I want to share it. And also, because through this process, I discovered how many subliminal influences we must contend with. We need presence of mind if we are to make healthy choices regarding food and make our experiences with the food we eat satisfyingly our own.

To get there, I promise you won't need to pull out your old college textbooks or even go to a yoga studio (unless you want to). These pages draw upon my research, interviews, and decades-long practice of mindfulness and meditation, and put it all together in a way you can use, starting right now.

Here are three key takeaways:

It's them. It's me. If not now, when?

*It's them.* There are a number of surprising, practically invisible, coming-from-all-directions external influences and mixed messages that impact our mealtime behavior and enjoyment. These stem from many things, including environmental sources and the use of digital devices.

*It's me.* We experience many nonlinear and transient internal moments of assessment, intent, and decision on our journey to mealtime outcomes. Our minds create our meal experiences, and it starts way before the first bite. We have assumptions and habits that drive our actions and direct our attention. Our attitudes are trained to be expectant and impulsive these days.

*If not now, when?* We must practice mindfulness in real time. Meditation is very helpful, but it's not the main event—each moment presents an opportunity to create our experience if we are interested enough to notice. While it takes a little nudge to your attention to remember to be present in the moment, it is not difficult. It is a skill that can be easily learned, and success can be tasted immediately.

All this led me to the realization that conscious, mindful micro-moments while on my food-consumption journey were the answer to my problems. *How* we plan, shop, and prepare our

meals greatly impacts what we put in our mouths. Our state of being during the many moments of our journey can make the difference between a rushed, crappy meal that we don't even notice we are eating and a wholesome, nourishing, tasty meal that was prepared efficiently and with grace.

Luckily, this pivot in approach is not one more thing to *do*. Because seriously, who has more time in the day? It's an inner shift.

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***Thank you for reading!***

*I look forward to sharing the book with you in November!*

*Kind regards, Heather*

### **Release Data**

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### **About the Author**

Heather is a busy chick, marketing executive, and happy mom who likes to eat well and live mindfully. She lives in Boston with her husband and son where she runs an e-commerce and consulting business. Heather has a BA with high honors in Asian Studies from the University of Michigan and an MBA from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University. She volunteers teaching meditation and mindfulness and enjoys tennis and cooking.

*Mind to Mouth* is her first book. Reach her at [www.heather-sears.com](http://www.heather-sears.com)