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Slow Your Roll and Chew Your Food

Eating more slowly is an under-appreciated way to be a little healthier.



Ever heard of **Horace Fletcher**? He was a health food enthusiast of the Victorian-era who argued that food should be chewed about 100 times before being swallowed. "Nature will castigate those who don't masticate" was his motto and it was his firm belief that food had to be chewed to a pulp to enable the enzymes in saliva to do their thing. The Great Masticator's beliefs on the importance of eating slowly actually made him millionaire and, 99 years after his death, a wealth of research suggests that he was onto something. Here's what making a point of not inhaling your food could do for you.

Eating slowly could improve your digestion

Horace Fletcher and physiologist Ivan Pavlov were born in the same year, 1849. Through their work, both knew that as soon as humans or their four-legged friends see, smell, or even think about food they begin salivating to prepare for putting that food in their mouths. Famously, Pavlov was studying conditioning whereas Fletcher's interests lay solely in the digestion of food and how to optimize it.

Fletcher knew that digestion begins in the mouth where enzyme-containing saliva gets a jump on breaking food down. He saw this as the first step in a chain reaction that would lead to the stomach producing more acid, the small intestine readying itself for some peristalsis and so on. He also knew that if the process is rushed, the GI tract has difficulty dealing with the influx.

A 2011 University of Rhode Island [study](#) looked at how eating speed affected the early stages of digestive processing by observing 60 young adults eat a meal. They found that slow eaters consumed two ounces of food per minute while fast eaters ate 3.1 ounces per minute, took larger bites, and chewed less before swallowing. That meant that fast eaters' food was sailing down their alimentary canals in lumps and not as chyme. Chyme is a liquid mix of partially digested food, hydrochloric acid, digestive enzymes, and water that passes through the pyloric valve on its way to elimination.

Food that isn't properly broken down into chyme can lead to indigestion and other potential GI problems. "When we eat quickly, two things are taking place: First, we're not fully chewing our food, and secondly, we are taking in more air when swallowing quickly. This can cause bloating, distention and discomfort," says Niket Sonpal, New York City-based gastroenterologist and professor of clinical medicine at Touro College.

It will also help you taste your food

Another benefit of eating more slowly is that you will taste your food more. Prolonging the time it takes you to eat a meal will enable you to experience more of the flavors, textures, and aromas of the food on your plate. In essence, eating will become more interesting.

"By slowing down you actually taste and enjoy your food," says New York-based registered dietician Amy Shapiro. "This often means you are not preoccupied by outside elements as well and therefore you are more satisfied with your food because you are being mindful, enjoying the experience, taste, texture, and company."

Researchers from the University of Chicago and Ohio State University put this idea to the **test** and challenged study participants to consume unexciting foods in novel ways. They found that people consistently rated their experiences as more enjoyable when they slowed their roll or otherwise changed things up.

In one part of the study, participants were given ten kernels of popcorn. Some were asked to eat with chopsticks, while others could eat with their hands. The researchers found that those who used chopsticks reported a more intense and focused eating experience. “When you eat popcorn with chopsticks, you pay more attention and you are more immersed in the experience,” Ohio State assistant professor of marketing Rob Smith, one of the study's authors, told OSU’s press office. “It’s like eating popcorn for the first time.”

You’ll feel fuller faster

Eating too fast may result in us not feeling as full as we should, says New York-based nutritionist Stephanie Di Figlia-Peck. “We often fall victim to this when we get overly hungry, or are very distracted,” Sonpal says. It takes about 15 or 20 minutes for us to feel full once we have started eating. “Most can pack on the calories before the brain gets the ‘I am full’ message, and the resulting response that it is time to stop eating.”

Another University of Rhode Island **study** looked at what happens to portion size when people are encouraged to eat quickly or slowly. On two occasions they invited 30 normal-weight women to eat a giant bowl of pasta to until they were comfortably full. On the first visit, they told the volunteers to eat as quickly as possible but on the second visit, they were instructed to eat slowly and put down their utensils between bites. Researchers found that when eating quickly, the women consumed 646 calories in 9 minutes. When eating slowly, the women consumed 579 calories in 29 minutes. That’s a difference of 67 calories which, as another study demonstrated, can really make a difference over time.

A five-year **study** that looked at the eating habits of 60,000 people with type 2 diabetes in Japan found that eating speed was a reliable predictor of obesity. Compared to people who described themselves as fast eaters, researchers found that those who said they ate at a normal speed were 29 percent less likely to be obese while people who identified as being slow eaters were 42 percent less likely to be obese.

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