Eight Ways To Be Mindful About Filling Your Belly
By Cynthia Lair

1. Notice the feeling of hunger.
Before finding a swig or a bite to stop the sensation, be awake to the fact that your body is asking for nourishment. You have the choice of how you will answer that demand.

2. Choose whole foods.
This requires some consciousness about where your food came from and how it was produced. If you are eating an egg, it is good to know that it came from a chicken. It is even more exciting to know how that chicken lived and what it ate.

Is there a label with a long list of ingredients on the food? Is it something you could make in your kitchen? Are all of the original edible parts of the plant present and accounted for? These questions offer clues about the wholeness of the food and ask us to contemplate its quality.

3. Avoid eating things that aren't food.
Stay awake. Read the labels. Pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, preservatives, dyes, fillers, stabilizers and other chemical concoctions used to increase profits are not food. Optimistically they are just foreign substances your body has to eliminate or store. Realistically they can set the stage for malfunction.

4. Cook when possible.
The conscious preparation of food adds another dimension to its ability to nourish you. When you chop and stir and sample your senses are engaged. The energy from your hands and thoughts goes into the food. There is no substitution for what you gain from food prepared by someone who loves you.

5. Express gratitude.
Recognizing all of the effort it took to get this food to your table is important. Seeds, sun, water, farmers, truck drivers and grocery store employees all had a part in providing you with food. If you have thoughtfully chosen what to eat, there is much to be thankful for.

6. Sit down and just eat.
Multi-tasking while you eat results in poor digestion. If you’re focused on something else while you eat sometimes your body doesn’t even realize it has been fed and hunger persists. Unconscious eating usually ends up putting on weight. Sharing food with others actually enhances metabolism.

7. Taste the food.
Often we quickly woof food down to stop the feeling of hunger. This can result in very poor digestion. If you don’t digest the food well, even the most nutrient dense foods will not be beneficial. Chewing is good. Sometimes when we take time to taste our drive-through fast-food, we find out we don’t really like it; we’re just eating it out of habit.

8. Hara Hachi Bu
This is one of the keys to longevity according to the Okinawans. It means “eat until you are eight tenths full.” Eating until you are groaning means you have taxed your digestion by consuming too many calories. Practice putting the fork down before you reach this point.

There is no “right” diet; the food and the need for it is the teacher.