



CHEAT SHEET

10 Good Reasons to Chew Your Food

Do you chew your food?

Because most of us don't. Most of us eat like snakes, breaking down our bites just enough so they'll fit down our throats before swallowing. The average number of times Americans chew each bite is 5-7. This may work fine for pudding, but it's not great for something with any fiber in it, like broccoli.

The act of thoroughly chewing your food is a powerful and often overlooked key to greater health, both physical and mental. Following is a list of the top 10 reasons you should chew every bite.

How many times should you chew each bite?

That depends on the type of food and size of the bite. Start by taking a reasonable sized forkful rather than a fist-sized bite. Proteins need to be softened or broken up thoroughly, but a lot of the digestive work for them will happen with the acid released in your stomach. Carbs, however, especially whole grains, beans and vegetables, need to be ground into a paste and thoroughly mixed with saliva for best digestion and maximum nutrient absorption. If you're counting, start with 20 chews per bite of carbs. To make it a meditative practice, try for 35 chews. As a simple, non-counting guideline, make sure that each bite has been reduced to a soft mash in your mouth –if you can roll it around and it still feels like a walnut or a piece of cauliflower, you've got more chewing to do.

Chewing

1. Improves your digestion

There are two crucial components of digestion designed to take place in the mouth. The first is the physical act of grinding the food down into a mash of smaller particles with the teeth. This is especially important for things like vegetables and grains, which have cellulose-based casings that encapsulate the oils and micronutrients at the core. These delicate nutrients will not be fully released for absorption unless the fibrous walls are ground up and broken down by the chompers.

The second crucial component is the release of key digestive enzymes in the mouth that begin the breakdown of carbohydrates (such as salivary alpha-amylase) and fats (such as lingual lipase). When you slow your eating down a bit and chew enough to taste the food before swallowing, this encourages a generous production of these digestive enzymes, many of which are only released in the mouth and not in the stomach. These enzymes need to be manually mixed with the ground up particles to form a mash that is perfectly primed to slip easily down the esophagus, broken down further by later-stage digestive substances, and absorbed into the bloodstream as tiny nutritive particles.

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Ten Good Reasons To Chew Your Food, continued.

2. Can help you lose weight

When you chew thoroughly, you will naturally eat less food. Over time this act alone can lead to a gradual weight loss. Thorough chewing takes time, which buys your body the time it needs to recognize (and enjoy!) the fact that it's eating. It takes 20 minutes for the brain to receive the chemical signals that we have eaten enough food. When we eat like snakes, we can swallow enough food for an army in 20 minutes! The more we chew, the slower we eat, and the more we can hear our body's signals of satiety.

3. Can help tame a sweet tooth

Because thorough chewing allows the digestive process to begin in the mouth, complex carbohydrates will begin to transform into glucose, the body's gasoline. The more we chew these carbs, the sweeter they will taste and the more satisfied we will feel.

4. Reduces the after-eating coma

Without the crucial process of the physical breakdown of the food particles and good mixing with the salivary enzymes from chewing, the body has to work very hard at digestion. Extra blood is sent to the digestive organs to assist, and the body begins to feel sluggish or sleepy, thus the post-prandial food coma.

Most of the glucose created by good digestion and the oxygen we breathe goes to feed the nervous system/brain. When we eat less and chew more, we not only increase sugar absorption, but also take in more oxygen during the meal than usual, which can lead to more clarity and alertness after eating.

5. Provides one of the crucial P Nutrients: Pleasure

Calm meditative chewing and eating gives you the opportunity to actually enjoy the fact that you are eating a meal. You can taste the food because it is spending more time running over your taste buds. It is also much more pleasurable to eat a meal slowly than at top speed, distracted by a thousand other things.

6. Can help you relax

Chewing your food is a natural relaxer. It is a slow, rhythmic, meditative action that, over time, will begin to send calming signals to your brain.

7. Can help with regularity and gas prevention

Grinding our food and fiber into smaller particles make it easier for the body to form balanced stools of the proper size and consistency to pass easily through the intestines and colon. Thorough chewing also supports the cephalic phase digestive response, which cues the body to begin producing digestive substances further down the pathway, such as hydrochloric acid in the stomach, thus speeding overall transit time. Incomplete chewing, on the other hand, leads to larger food particles in the colon, which encourages bacterial growth and the subsequent release of, ahem, gases.

Bloat, anyone?

8. Can reduce bad breath

There are several causes of halitosis (stinky breath). But most people with chronic bad breath suffer from incomplete digestion and elimination. That smell can come, in part, from food in the system that is putrefying. Chew down those food particles and you will reduce some of the bacterial growth causing the smells.

9. Interrupts conditioned eating patterns

Conscious chewing can make you aware of automatic unhealthy eating patterns, (such as horking your food down practically whole!), and help you alter the habit over time.

10. Can cut down on your grocery bill

As you practice chewing and conscious eating, you will become more satisfied with less food, thus saving money on groceries and in restaurants. With the regular practice of thorough chewing, you will realize how little food your body actually needs, and come to eat less food overall.