

Busy schedules and eating to beat the clock might have a major impact on your weight loss goals. New research presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions links faster eating speed with more weight gain, higher blood glucose and a larger waistline.

Ashley Simper, an OSF HealthCare Registered Dietitian, says mindful eating comes with dramatic benefits. She says it takes about 20 minutes for our brains to communicate with our digestive systems that we are full, so eating slowly could decrease the likelihood overeating, and in turn, decrease our risk of obesity.

"When we are shoveling food down our mouths, and not paying attention to how long it's taking, then we are increasing the likelihood that we are eating excess calories, because we are going back for seconds, we aren't being mindful," said Simper. "So when we are able to take that time, and there's a few techniques you can use, then we are being more mindful and are paying attention to the fact that we are actually truly full and not just going back because we haven't listened to those signals."

Simper says we should aim to take roughly 20 to 30 minutes to eat a meal. She warns that it could take some getting used to, but has some suggestions. She says you can set a timer, put utensils down or take sips of water between bites. Simper says or even switching your fork out for chopsticks or toddler utensils can help.

"It's definitely something that if you haven't tried it's going to be weird the first few times you try it," warned Simper. "But I guarantee you will actually start appreciating eating the foods you are eating by taking that time, setting your fork down, chewing it. You're going to see it in a whole new light when you are actually being mindful about how long you are taking to eat the food."

Simper adds, some of the biggest culprits of not eating mindfully are distractions, like meals in front of the television or with electronics in hand.

"Take away the distractions. So when you are actually sitting down at the table you're having conversations with people, you're going to be more mindful. Take that time to eat, and you're going to be a lot more likely to know your true fullness cues," she said.

Another tip for weight loss success from Simper: don't skip meals in general. She says when you skip a meal, you go into the next one too hungry, making it harder to pace yourself. Instead choose healthy meals throughout the day can keep you on track for achieving a healthy weight.