- Eating customs

Finishing the meal in 20 minutes? It's time to slow down

From reducing the risk of obesity to less bloating and indigestion, eating your food slowly has several benefits

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Experts tend to focus on foods to eat to improve your health. But the speed at which you devour your meal matters just as much. The risk with eating too fast includes food getting stuck and the potential to overeat before your brain tells you to stop. Here are some tips on how to slow down and be more mindful:



HOW FAST IS TOO FAST?

If you're one who regularly polishes off a meal in less than 20-30 minutes, you're eating too fast. "It usually takes about 20 minutes for the stomach to communicate to the brain via a whole host of hormonal signals that it's full," said Leslie Heinberg, Centre for Behavioural Health, adding, "When people eat rapidly, they can miss these signals and eat beyond the point of fullness."

WHY IS IT A PROBLEM? People that eat quickly swallow more air which can lead to bloating or indigestion. Not chewing your food properly can affect digestion and you won't get all the nutrients. Unchewed bites could also get stuck in your esophagus. Previous studies says those who eat quickly have higher risk of obesity.

HOW TO SLOW DOWN?

Turn off the TV and put down your phone. "If you're eating while you watch TV, people tend to eat until there's a commercial or the show is over," Leslie said, adding they are less inclined to pay attention to the body's signals. "When we do things while we're eating, we're eating less mindfully. And that often causes us to eat more," says Leslie. When people focus on eating, they tend to enjoy the meal more and eat less.

Leslie believes the pace at which you eat is often an ingrained habit. However,

McCarthy, a clinical psychologist with the British Psychological Society (UK).

"If you chew each mouthful a little bit longer, that will slow down your eating," she said. The kind of food you eat also make a difference. It's easier to eat ultra-processed or fast foods quicker, as they typically have a softer texture. "It is hard to eat vegetables and protein at the same rate as something that's highly processed and requires less chewing," shares Helen.

change is still possible. Things like using your non-dominant hand to eat, trying utensils you don't use like chopsticks or taking a break to drink water can help you slow down.

If you have a busy life, it might be unavoidable to eat lunch at a work meeting or snack while running errands. But Sarah Berry, chief scientist at the British nutritional company ZOE, said when possible, "be mindful of what the food tastes and feels like."

"If we're not fully present, it's very easy to eat more quickly and not notice how much we've consumed," Berry said.