

Mindful Eating – Conscious Living™: An acceptability study

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HEADLINES

- **Mindful eating is a powerful and accessible intervention with many benefits.**
- **However, it's not easy to learn, and needs to be delivered skilfully.**

1) WHAT IS IT?

- **ME-CL** is an 8-week mindfulness programme focused on food and eating.



2) WHY RESEARCH IT?

- ME-CL is sufficiently different to existing 8-week mindful eating programmes, such as MB-EAT and BEFree, as it targets the general population rather than those engaged in binge eating.
- It has yet to be put to clinical trial.
- Originating in the US, it is now being taught in many different countries – does it translate well in other cultural contexts?

3) RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is ME-CL an acceptable intervention for women in the UK?
- Is a UK ME-CL treatment manual needed?

4) METHOD

- Three focus groups of 12 women in the UK were given an overview of the programme and session plans for 2 of the 8 classes, plus an experience of a mindful eating exercise.
- Using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis method, the transcriptions of the focus groups were coded from a critical realist and contextualist stance.
- An initial thematic map has now been generated, along with descriptions of each theme.

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The power and benefits of mindful eating

ME-CL is accessible to women in the UK

It's never just about eating

Mindful eating is hard

Mindful eating has to be delivered well

Mindful eating isn't enough

5) INITIAL RESULTS

1. **THE POWER AND BENEFITS OF MINDFUL EATING:** This theme speaks to the positive impacts of approaching eating more mindfully. These were wide-ranging, from improving eating behaviour to improving wellbeing and increasing joy.
 - i. **ME-CL IS ACCESSIBLE TO WOMEN IN THE UK:** This sub-theme of 'the power and benefits of mindful eating' directly addresses the research questions. The data did not indicate a need for a separate UK manual.
2. **MINDFUL EATING IS HARD:** This is because the process of learning how to bring more mindful awareness to food and eating, while very powerful, can be very difficult, for practical and experiential reasons.
 - i. **IT'S NEVER JUST ABOUT EATING:** Habitual eating behaviours are transmitted down generations within a societal context focused on a thin ideal.
3. **MINDFUL EATING HAS TO BE DELIVERED WELL:** Teachers need to be flexible and firm, sensitive and gently encouraging. Cultural competency is very important, so that American elements can be de-emphasised in favour of appropriate, local vocabulary.
4. **MINDFUL EATING ISN'T ENOUGH:** Developing the capacity to eat with more mindful awareness may be only part of the journey. Other important aspects could be improving nutritional knowledge and cooking skills.

CONCLUSION: ME-CL shows initial promise, but further research is needed to test its efficacy and feasibility.