

Kelli Saginak, EdD
Life, Weight, & Functional Health Coach

3 Mindful Practices To Help You Stop Anxious Eating



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RELIEF STARTS HERE!

Hello!

I'm grateful that you took a chance by downloading "*3 Mindful Practices*." I'm sure that you're doubtful that anything could possibly help you feel less anxious and stop your anxious eating. I used to feel that way too, as have many of the women I've worked with.

We used to think that anxiety was a bad thing and that we had to do everything in our power to get rid of it. We also thought that food was the best way to do that. Yet, even though eating provided temporary relief, it also caused other issues such as gas, bloating, weight gain, hormonal imbalance, disrupted sleep, and a whole lot of shame.

Clearly, food was never intended to relieve anxiety, right? But we didn't know what else to do? We couldn't see any other options. This was me and I suspect this is you too. You do what you think and feel works. If you get a little relief from a certain action, even if only temporary, you repeat it. Before long, you've repeated the behavior enough to where it's become an engrained, unconscious habit. You feel anxious, you eat. . . and you eat a lot!

This was totally me until I experienced the benefits of mindfulness. It's been the best relief ever! Do I still feel anxious, sure! But not near as much as I used to and when I do, I know confidently how to respond to it. And the best part? How I respond to anxiety doesn't involve food! Yay!

The three mindful practices I am sharing were created by well-known experts and practitioners, are proven effective, and yet are not difficult or complicated. They are absolutely free and can be practiced any time and virtually any where. Each one is slightly different, although similar in that they are grounded in mindfulness, the present, and breath.

If practiced regularly and consistently, these three mindful practices can bring some relief and also transform your relationship with your mind, body, and emotions. They're intended to calm your nervous system while also helping you discover that there's no need to fear your emotions and that you can feel them fully without needing food to cope. As you grow in your ability to feel your all your feelings, including anxiety, food can return to its natural role, and you can start feeling better and living well.

R.A.I.N.



Photo by Jose Fontano on Unsplash

Clinical psychologist, meditation expert, and author, Tara Brach created the practice of R.A.I.N. to help people learn how to experience difficult emotions mindfully and compassionately. The practice teaches how to observe our thoughts and feel our feelings without needing to react or seek comfort from food.

The mindful practice of R.A.I.N. involves the following four steps:

RECOGNIZE what is going on.

What's happening now? Notice what is happening. Acknowledge your feelings and any physical sensations. Watch the negative limiting thoughts and beliefs. Observe everything that comes up.

ALLOW the experience to be as it is.

Allowing means accepting the thoughts, feelings, or sensations you recognize as simply being there, without taking any action or reaching for food. Accepting what is does not mean that you have to agree; allowing teaches how to sit with all our judg-

mental, critical thoughts and beliefs, and painful, anxious feelings and emotions without having to do anything. Although, you may find allowing more accessible by whispering an encouraging word or phrase to yourself, such as *I'm okay*.

INVESTIGATE with interest and care.

Once you recognize and allow what is, you can deepen your understanding through investigation. With curiosity and a deep desire to know the truth, focus your attention on your present experience. Ask yourself: *What wants attention most? Where am I experiencing this in my body? What does it feel like? What am I thinking and believing? What does anxiety want from me? What does it need most?* To receive the benefits of investigating, bring your full attention to the experience in your body. Approach your experience in a non-judgmental, kind, and compassionate attitude of care.

NURTURE with self-compassion.

When we recognize our suffering, self-compassion flows naturally as we consciously nurture ourselves with care and loving kindness. Listen to what the anxious place inside you needs most and offer compassionate self-care. Ask: *Does it need acceptance? approval? reassurance? forgiveness? companionship? love?*

Experiment with gestures of care to see what provides the most comfort and calms or opens your heart. You might prefer a compassionate mental whisper such as, *I'm listening. I'm here. I won't leave you. It's not your fault. You are worthy and enough.*

You might also nurture yourself by placing your hand on your heart; or by envisioning being wrapped in a blanket of warm, radiant light. If it feels too difficult to offer yourself nurturing self-compassion, bring to mind a loving being (your beloved, a family member, a spiritual figure, or pet) and imagine that being's love and care washing over you.

After you complete the four steps of RAIN, pause and simply notice. Rest in conscious awareness of your true, amazing, and authentic self. Notice the freedom of simply being with *all* of you, your thoughts, feelings, and sensations without , judging, reacting or reaching for food.

URGE SURFING

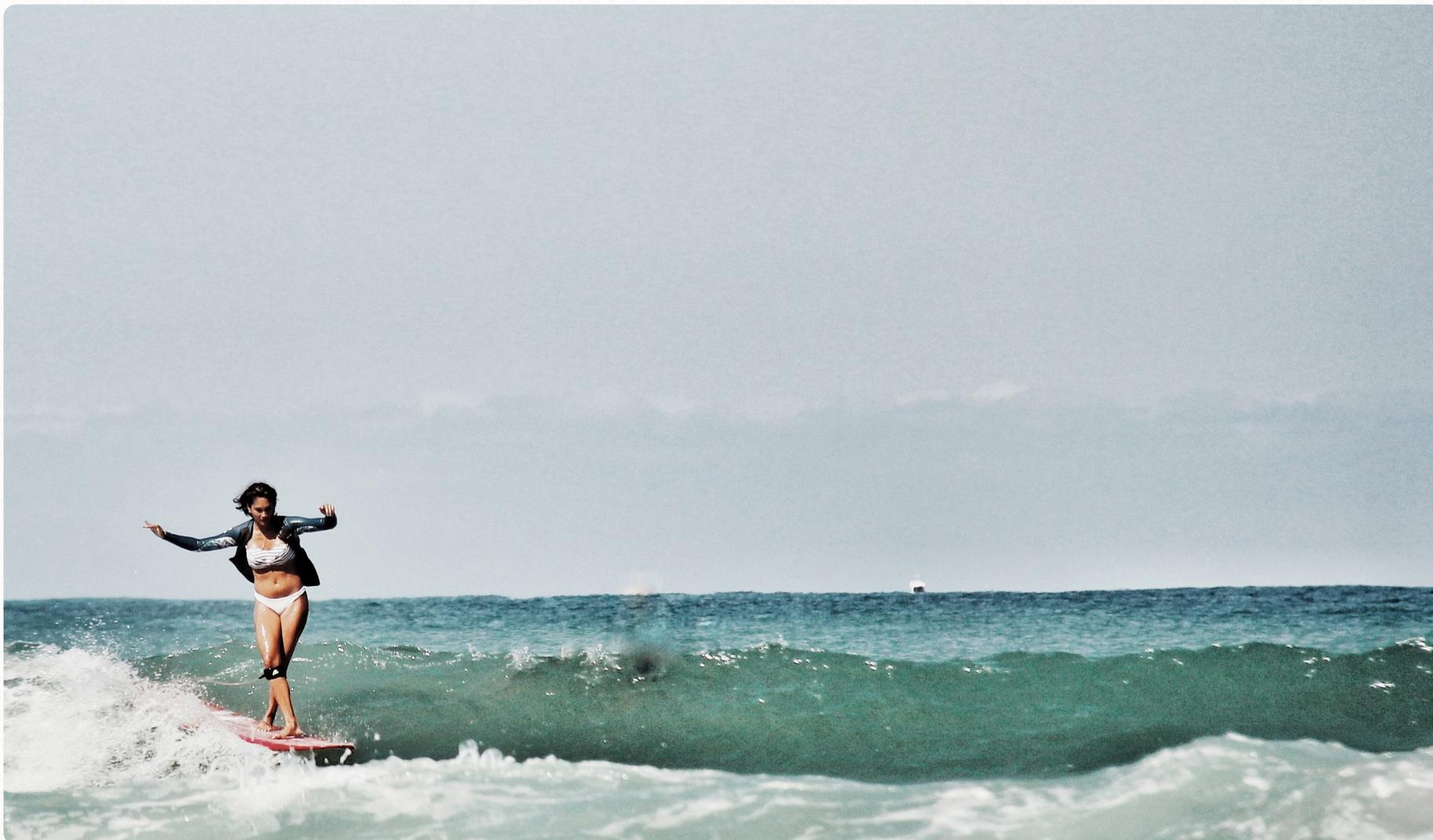


Photo by Emma Paillex on Unsplash

Urge surfing is a calm centering practice developed by Alan Marlatt, Ph.D. to help individuals in addictions recovery manage cravings and urges. Specifically, an urge is an impulse to react to a feeling or sensation in the body using a habit. In this case, it's the habit of anxious eating, maybe even drinking.

Because of our repetitive habitual reaction to the urge, we've created a think-feel-act habit that has become engrained or memorized in our brain. We think anxious thoughts, we feel anxious, we eat or drink to relieve the urge.

One way to change our reaction to urges is to practice responding in a different, kinder, and healthier way that acknowledges the urge, responds to it intentionally and consciously, while calming our nervous system, and growing our capacity to feel and experience any emotion or sensation. This is where urge surfing comes in.

Like waves, urges, even cravings, rise in intensity, peak, and eventually crash and return to the ocean waters. If we're willing to be open and curious toward the urge, and observe it compassionately without fighting with it or resisting, the urge will eventually

subside. However, if we fight with our urges or give in to them, relief will come much slower and we'll actually strengthen the urge and deplete our confidence in our ability to stop anxious eating.

The practice of urge surfing goes like this:

1. Pause and notice the urge. Avoid judging the urge. Simply observe it as you lovingly come to know it well. If you feel afraid, that's okay and very normal. Realize that the urge cannot harm you. It simply wants your attention, similar to a toddler wanting a toy or treat that it can't have.

2. Breathing slowly and fully, locate where you feel the urge in your body. Feel all the emotions and sensations that come with the urge without reacting or judging. Compassionately scan your body while pausing at each place where you feel the urge.

3. Focus your attention on where you feel the urge. It could be in your stomach, chest, or even your mouth. There is no right or wrong place to feel an urge. Describe the urge in your mind. *Where do you feel it? What does it feel like? Does it feel like pressure, tingling, warmth, coolness, or something else? What color is it? Does the urge have a smell? A voice? What is the urge telling you?*

4. Connect more fully to your breathing. Imagine sending your breath to the parts of your body where you feel the urge (e.g., breathe into your shoulders, chest). Notice if and how the sensations change as you observe them.

5. Then, begin using your breath like you would a surfboard to support you as you ride the wave of the urge. Follow the rise and fall of your breath as you ride out each wave of the urge. No matter how big the waves, no matter how afraid you are that the wave will consume you, realize that you are a skilled surfer and have the support of your breath to ride each wave as it comes. You might even whisper, *"Inhale. Exhale."* Or, *"Breathing in. Breathing out."*

6. Once the urge subsides, thank yourself for urge surfing, strengthening your emotional resilience, and your ability to feel and experience urges without having to take any real action or reach for food.

LEAVES ON A STREAM



Photo by Oskars Sylwan on Unsplash

Dr. Russ Harris, specialist in the practice of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, created this beautiful mindful practice to help diffuse difficult emotions, such as anxiety, cognitively by changing our relationship with our thoughts. Thus, relief comes when we realize that we are not our thoughts and by looking at our thoughts through fresh new eyes. Instead of getting caught up in negative thinking and feeling anxious, we start releasing our attachment to our negative thinking.

Ready to float downstream?

- (1) Find a comfortable position that you can relax into and yet remain alert. Close your eyes or lower your gaze.
- (2) Begin to visualize yourself sitting near a serene flowing stream with an array of colorful leaves floating on the surface of the water. Pause to take in the stream and the floating leaves with all your senses. Visualize the colors, the smells, and all the sensations of the experience.

(3) Next, take each thought in your mind and place it gently on a leaf and watch it float by. Do this with each thought. Even if you have joyful, loving, or excited thoughts, set them on a leaf and let them float by.

(4) If your thoughts stop for a moment, keep watching the stream and the leaves. Your thoughts will eventually start again.

(5) Let the stream flow with ease. Avoid speeding up the stream or rushing your thoughts along in order to “*get rid*” of your thoughts. You are allowing your thoughts to come and go on their own without reacting to them.

(6) If your mind says “*This is stupid,*” “*I’m bored,*” or “*I can’t do this,*” place those thoughts on leaves and let them float by.

(7) If a leaf gets hung up, let it hang around until it’s ready to float down stream. If the thought comes up again, place it on a leaf, and watch it float by again.

(8) If an anxious or painful feeling comes up, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, “*I notice myself feeling anxious/impatient/frustrated.*” Place those thoughts on leaves and allow them to float on by.

(9) From time to time, your thoughts may trigger you and distract you from being fully present in this exercise. This is normal and okay. As soon as you realize that you have become sidetracked, gently bring your attention back to the leaves floating on a stream.

Practicing “*Leaves On A Stream*” regularly can help you begin to reframe the anxieties that you encounter and start seeing them as opportunities for exploration and growth. Cognitive defusion takes practice so be gentle and patient with your mind and yourself. Perhaps start with 3-5 minutes at first and increase as you feel ready. By choosing to practice regular mindful cognitive defusion you begin to loosen the grip of the negative, limiting thoughts causing you to feel anxious and begin to taste freedom from anxious eating.

THANK YOU!

Once again, thank you for taking the time to download the “3 Mindful Practices” and give them a try. Whereas some women experience immediate relief, the most relief comes from consistent use of the 3 practices. Over time, you will notice a difference. My clients and I do!

If you're ready for additional support or want to know more about how I healed my own anxiety and anxious eating, please reach out. You can email me at kelli@kellisaginak.com or reach me through my website at www.kellisaginak.com.

Until we meet again...

Feel better, live well!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelli" with a small heart symbol to the right. Below the name is a decorative flourish.

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