

## Transforming Non-Mindful Eating with the “4 Rs”

This is a process I was taught that allows us to use mindfulness to shift habitual patterns, many of which cause us suffering. It can apply to any habit that is not serving us any longer, any urge or automatic behavior. It is particularly useful when working with the process of eating more mindfully and intuitively.

### 1. RECOGNIZE:

Recognizing when we are in, or on the brink of responding to a situation in a habitual or compulsive way is the first and most essential step toward becoming free of it. Empathy, Gentleness, and Compassion toward ourselves is essential. Often it is the shame and frustration we have with our habits that keeps us from recognizing them with “open eyes”. When you recognize you are acting within the old habit, or want to- it is good news and you have the opportunity to learn from it and change. There are plenty of situations where we realize after we have already reacted automatically. This is also good news ! Recognizing when we keep stepping in the same “pothole” or eating reactively, un-mindfully, also gives us chance to understand what is happening, to keep learning and changing.

### 2. REFRAIN:

The mindful eating practices, intuitive eating guidelines and the hunger sensing practices that we engage in are a way of building our connection with our body and it’s natural needs and rights. The practices are also a way of refraining from eating non-mindfully, or acting in an unconscious or automatic way. We refrain from automatically scratching the itch and inquire within instead. We know that the tendency to rebel against dieting or severe restriction is a healthy response to a problematic set of rules. Yet the tendency to want to rebel against mindful eating practices is powerful too ! In refraining, we need to find the same love and gentleness to support our new actions. It won’t work to try to punish ourselves into eating more mindfully and could just create more rebellion, shame or unworthiness. When we refrain from the automatic actions of our outmoded habits we have a chance to find more affirming practices that lead to more peace and less suffering.

### 3. RELAX:

How can you relax at a time like this ? Yet it’s the most compassionate thing we can do for ourselves- it’s exactly what we need. We relax with the urge to follow our habitual response. If we refrain we are left with the underlying energy or feeling. We are left with a shaky feeling or vulnerable place. But we can then consider what we really need, and what drives our choices can become more clear if we can practice “relaxing into” our experience. In other words, the discomfort or pain of emotions we don’t like to feel often become even more painful if we try to deny them or push them away to somehow avoid feeling the

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shakiness, the itch, or the irritation. Perhaps boredom is a trigger that provokes less anxiety, but can still feel intolerable. The difficulty and anxiety from this can become so intense that we may be compelled to find a way to distract from it, numb it out, or make it go away by doing something that we have found to work- food, drugs, working too much and so on. Relaxing into our experience, what we are feeling emotionally, what we are thinking, what we are sensing physically, gives us essential clues as to what we need most in that moment to take care of ourselves. We can decide if we are physically hungry. We can then choose to eat something that we want, something that will nourish our body and give us the fuel we need. If we are not physically hungry- eating is not going to give us what we need long term to feel better. It may or may not provide short term relief or entertainment, but if we're not truly hungry it could also create suffering. Relaxing and becoming more aware takes the negative power and fear out of our feelings and puts us on the road to healthy soothing. We can begin to take care of ourselves without relying on food as our only source of soothing.

#### 4. RESOLVE:

Becoming aware of that which has confused us or scared us takes patience, love, courage and time. Whether your habit is aggression, drinking, overworking or overeating, we are trying to let go of a kind of security blanket that has probably served us for a long time. We find "resolve" or determination to stay on this path by accepting that we need to find new, more self affirming ways to chart our progress so we are encouraged to keep going. We affirm for ourselves that that staying on this path requires us to commit to it again and again. Resolving to keep interrupting, redirecting, and transforming the momentum of this pattern as best we can.

Have you used the "4 R's" in your life ? What have you found most liberating ? What have you found most challenging ? Visit our blog and share your comments- we would love to hear from you !

If you are local to Denver, please visit our Mindful Eating – Mindful Yoga Workshops where we share our experience of this path. [www.integrativelife.net](http://www.integrativelife.net)



*Pema Chodron has described the "4 R's" in many talks and publications. These teachings are adapted here by Erica Viggiano.*

*[http://www.gampoabbey.org/ane\\_pema/index.html](http://www.gampoabbey.org/ane_pema/index.html)*