



The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed

EPISODE #17

TITLE: The Weight Loss Secret of 'Social Nutrition': Eat with Others, Lose Weight

"Sitting together around a table for meals is far more than a practical necessity. The sharing of food and drink is probably the most ancient ritual of mankind."

-- Manuela Mascetti and Arunima Borthwick
Food for Spirit

For millennia, sharing fare has been integral to cultures worldwide. Today, we know that dining with others ups the odds of weight loss and well-being.

TRANSCRIPT

Hello! Welcome to The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed. TODAY'S TOPIC: The Weight Loss Power of Social Nutrition: Eat with Others, Lose Weight.

I'm Deborah Kesten—nutrition researcher and host of The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed, and I'm on a mission: To give you the science-backed, weight-loss wisdom you need to eat less and weigh less. Without dieting.

In each episode, I'll translate cutting-edge weight-loss research into actions you can take that can make a real difference in your weight and well-being.

LET'S GET STARTED!

Today we're doing a deep dive into this pioneering finding: What I call the Solo Dining overeating style that behavioral scientist Larry Scherwitz, PhD and I discovered. We'll cover the influence of Solo Dining on your weight and well-being, and how the opposite of Solo Dining--eating with others more often than not--can up your odds of eating less and weighing less. Without dieting.

The 'Solo Dining' Overeating Style

What exactly is the new-normal Solo Dining overeating style? You tell me! Do you see yourself in any of these scenerios?

- eating meals and snacks alone at your desk while working?
- grabbing, say, a pepperoni pizza on your way home, then eating it by yourself while watching TV?
- filling up on some fast-food favorite while you drive to your next appointment.

The Solo Dining overeating style Larry and I identified is an interconnected family of eating behaviors that include whether a person does—or doesn't—eat mostly: (1) with family members, (2) with friends, (3) at home at the dining table, (4) or alone--which has become more typical for most of us--especially with the work-at-home lifestyle that Covid launched.

Larry and I discovered the Solo Dining overeating style when we did research with 5,256 people who filled out our 80-item "What's Your Overeating Style?" questionnaire before and after they completed my 6-week, 18-lesson, online e-course on Whole Person Integrative Eating (WPIE).

When we looked closely at the results, not only did we discover the new-normal overeating style of Solo Dining (meaning, eating alone more often than not) -- *and* that what I call **Social Nutrition** is a viable element of nutritional health--we also discovered that Solo Dining is one of seven 'new-normal' overeating behaviors that are linked with overeating and being overweight or obese.

(A brief aside...If you want to know more about the overeating styles, please visit HealingSecretsPodcast.com and listen to EPISODE 3).

A Solo Dining Culture

To continue...

Here's what I mean when I say we are "a Solo Dining culture." At the start of a presentation or workshop, I sometimes begin by inviting the audience to share a memorable meal. At first, there's often silence and stares. Then, slowly, I see a few raised hands as more and more people recall an outstanding dining experience. Here's a sampling of some shared-meal memories: a homemade holiday feast at the home of lifelong friends; savoring simple campfire food as a preteen during an overnight with girlfriends; a romantic anniversary meal at a candlelit restaurant, savored by an elderly couple who found each other late in life.

In my experience, shared reveries of cherished meals *always* include eating with others in warm, welcoming, pleasing surroundings—and it often includes the other elements of the Whole Person Integrative Eating dietary lifestyle Larry and I discovered: fresh food, positive feelings, gratitude, mindfulness, pleasing surroundings, and loving regard.

I don't recall hearing a memorable meal story that reflects the "Solo Dining" overeating style--such as eating a sandwich or snack, perhaps while texting or being otherwise distracted by the details of daily life; driving home at night while munching a 500-calorie muffin from a nearby convenience store; or perhaps having a secret, private "zone out" in front of the TV with a pint of ice cream and a bag of favorite chips.

Do you see yourself in any of the new-normal Solo Dining experiences I just mentioned? If so, you have lots of company. We are a lonely culture, and nowhere is this more evident than in the millions who eat meals by themselves. Children reach for a piece of packaged pizza, then eat it at the computer; single working women heat up their low-cal frozen meal in the microwave, then dine solo while watching TV; and anxious traveling salesmen are driven to dashboard dining while en route to yet another meeting.

Not surprisingly, these Solo Dining scenarios also reflect the other new-normal overeating styles Larry and I identified: Food Fretting, Task Snacking, Emotional Eating, Fast Foodism, Unappetizing Atmosphere, and Sensory Disregard. This isn't surprising, because the seven overeating styles are an interconnected family of eating behaviors that lead to weight issues.

The Health-and-Healing Power of Social Nourishment

I'm excited to be sharing with you today the health and healing power of what I call 'social nourishment,' because not will you discover how to turn dining with others into a balm for body, heart, and soul, we'll also explore how meals can contain invaluable memories that help to heal what writer Elizabeth Cady Stanton describes as "the solitude of self."

As you'll see, when you unite with others through food--and your eating style shifts from a "me" mentality to a "we" awareness--you'll feel connected to something larger than your personal concerns, food related and otherwise. And when you do, you'll ignite the healing light of social connection. And--as you'll discover in state-of-the-art studies I'll be telling you about--'social nourishment' also ups the odds health and healing.

A Meal Cradled in 'Social Nourishment'

Right now, I want to start our discussion about what I call 'social nourishment' with a personal story about a soul-satisfying, social dining experience Larry and I had a one memorable New Year's Eve. From beginning to end, the meal was cradled in hospitality, friendship, fresh food . . . and an ancient heart-to-heart ritual. For us, it was a reminder that creating meaningful connections with others over a meal has been a time-tested tradition, in cultures worldwide, for thousands of years.

Our memorable meal began when we met Nailia Menne at our friend Roslyn's home in northern California. Originally from Kazakhstan, Nailia told us about the *tamada* tradition when I mentioned that the English language needed a new word to describe the invisible ingredients that create "meal magic" when friends share good conversation while enjoying delicious food.

"There is an ancient tradition that no Kazakh celebration is complete without wine and a *tamada*, the host or toastmaster, whose role is to create a pleasurable ambiance and ensure that everyone present is honored and enjoys the occasion," Nailia told us. "Whether the gathering is small or a meal for many, it is a great honor for the person who is asked to be the tamada. Throughout the meal, starting with the elderly, for whom there is much respect, followed by those who have traveled far for the occasion, the tamada invites each guest to toast people, the food, or the event. From the first course to the main course and then dessert, the *tamada* invites a toast. In this way, every person is honored through the modern expression of an ancient tradition that embodies the best of friendship and shared food."

As New Year's Eve continued to unfold, I knew that not only had I found the word for a time-honored ritual that embodies the special spirit of shared food and friendship but I had just had the honor of having experienced this heart-to-heart, meaningful, love-filled tradition.

Before continuing to explore the healing power of Social Nutrition, I'd like to make a toast to you, dear listener: This episode of The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed is dedicated to tamada-flavored food and friendship . . . for everyone . . . all ways, all days.

Solo Dining and Your Weight

So you'll have a better understanding about the link between social nourishment and weight, now's a good time to delve into state-of-the-art studies about how eating with others--as often as possible--leads to eating less and weighing less. And how social connection may even protect against heart disease.

Let's begin first with the discovery of the Solo Dining overeating style, and how Larry's and my research on this overeating style, and many other studies--worldwide, international studies--have also linked eating alone with overweight and obesity.

A brief recap: As with all 7 overeating styles Larry and I identified, we found that Social Nutrition is an interconnected web that is a family of eating behaviors. This family of "social" eating behaviors include: (1) eating with family, (2) eating with friends, (3) eating at home at the dining table, (4) and eating alone. This is the "interconnected web" of social eating behaviors we identified, which means that when people eat at home and at the dining table it is natural to find that they also typically eat with family and friends; and that, less often, they eat by themselves.

Overeating & Weight Loss. To be specific, a closer look at the Social Nutrition elements from our national sample of 5,200 people revealed that those who eat at home at the dining table are less likely to overeat and to be overweight. As a matter of fact, eating at home at the dining table was the strongest predictor of less overeating and weight gain. Not so for eating with family or eating alone. These didn't have any relationship to overeating or weight.

The bottom line: The more often people in our study ate meals at home at their dining table, the more weight they lost and the less they overate. And though the connection was weaker, eating more frequently with family and friends was also linked with weight loss.

What's sobering--and very telling--about our research findings on Solo Dining is the discovery that chronic social isolation while eating increases the probability that you'll overeat. Our research suggests this, and so does a growing body of state-of-the-art studies from many researchers worldwide.

Now, here's a look at the latest research on the new-normal Solo Dining trend and what it means to your weight and well-being.

Solo Dining, Loneliness, and Obesity

If you typically eat alone, you've got lots of company. The statistics on the Solo Dining overeating style are nothing less than daunting. As far back as 10 years ago, surveys revealed that the eat-alone trend was escalating: 30 to 40 percent of families were not eating together most of the time.

In response, hoping to make inroads into traditional, social, sit-down family meals, the Centre for Fathering launched "Eat with Your Family Day" in 2003. Still, today, nearly half—46 percent—of adults are completely alone when they eat.

As a matter of fact, the escalating eat-alone trend is a growing concern, because more and more studies support our discovery about the Solo Dining overeating style and its link to being overweight and obese. Put another way, more researchers are finding links between the Solo Dining trend, its twin, loneliness, and being overweight and obese.

Here's a sampling:

- Researchers in Japan found that eating alone and living alone are jointly associated with higher risk of obesity and unhealthy eating behaviors (translation: consuming lots of fast, ultra-processed junk food) in both men and women.
- In a U.S. study with 8,459 kindergarten children, those who watched TV during dinner—instead of eating family meals while having convivial conversation—were more likely to be overweight by the time they were in third grade.
- A two-year study out of Korea revealed that the obesity rate of those who ate all three meals—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—by themselves was almost one-and-a-half (1.4) times higher than those who ate all meals with others. Yet another study from Korea showed a clear correlation between lone diners in their twenties and their being obese.

Here's the takeaway: please keep in mind that whether you eat alone—or with others—it's part of a web of the Whole Person Integrative Eating solutions to the overeating styles, meaning that whether you eat with others or solo, it is one of seven elements of Whole Person Integrative Eating that give you guidelines to reverse Solo Dining and the other overeating styles.

What I'm saying is this: Solo Dining is simply one of the chords of the food-and-dining symphony and its relationship to your weight and well-being. In other words, people who typically eat by themselves may or may not practice the other overeating styles. For instance, unlike the people in the study from Japan, who lived alone and ate mostly fast food and gained weight, it's possible to eat alone and typically choose fresh, whole food and therefore not necessarily overeat and gain weight.

Some Good News Studies: The Healing Power of Social Nourishment

While the new-normal eat-alone trend--both in the U.S. and worldwide--may seem quite disheartening, here are some studies about the healing power of eating with others.

I call study #1 'The Healing Power of Social Ties'

Study I: The Healing Power of Social Ties

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The idea that family meals can serve as a buffer against ailments emerged in a landmark twenty-five-year study that began in the early 1960s in the small town of Roseto, Pennsylvania, when a local physician told researcher Stewart Wolf that he rarely saw cases of heart disease in the town's Italian American population. Intrigued, Wolf set out to study the Rosetans, hoping to discover why their rate of heart disease was so low. Even though they consumed a traditional high-fat, high-cholesterol Italian American diet of sauces, sausages, and other artery-clogging food, the rate of heart disease and mortality from heart attacks remained low in Roseto.

As the long-term study progressed, so did the rate of heart disease among the Italian Americans—so much so that it soon equaled that of the general American population. When Wolf and his colleagues scrutinized the data, the main difference that surfaced was the change in human relationships. When the study started, close family ties and community cohesion were the norm; it was common to find three generations living together in one home. But as the children became adults, they moved away from Roseto. Over time, family and community cohesion began to weaken, along with commitment to religion, relationships, and traditional values. The close-knit way of life that had united Rosetans since their migration to Roseto in 1882 had ended—along with its prophylactic effect on heart disease.

Social connection. The pioneering study in Roseto explores the shift in heart disease of an Italian American community over a quarter century, but it is also about the influence of human relationships and social support on the metabolism of high-fat, high-cholesterol, calorie-dense foods. Amazingly, this study suggests that when social support is present in our lives, especially when we eat, *what* we eat—even foods not perceived as being heart healthy—is somehow metabolized differently and in turn may not harm health.

The Roseto study also tells us that when a meal is infused with social ingredients, some kind of healing alchemy seems to be set into motion. Indeed, the Roseto study suggests that eating in a socially supportive atmosphere can serve as a buffer against ailments.

Study II: The Healing Power of Love-Filled Feeding

Research results on the people of Roseto seemed to have anticipated future studies that would serendipitously link dining with others in a caring, supportive environment to health and healing benefits.

For instance, an amazing study by researcher Robert M. Nerem at Emory University School of Medicine, who, as with the Roseto social study, discovered an invisible healing web between caring relationships and the health-protecting metabolism of potentially artery-clogging food. In Nerem's study, rabbits in the middle tier of cages fed a high-cholesterol diet—who were held, talked to, and nurtured during feeding—had small amounts, or no clogged arteries, compared to those in the lower and higher rungs who were not held while being fed.

A Perspective-Taking Moment

Let's take a moment to get some perspective.

Both the Roseto and the rabbit studies imply that there's a mystery to how we metabolize food and that eating while experiencing a pleasant, caring connection to others matters to our health and well-being. Physician Deepak Chopra speculates about such invisible nutrients in food with his statement that "consciousness could be one of the crucial determinants of the metabolism of food itself."

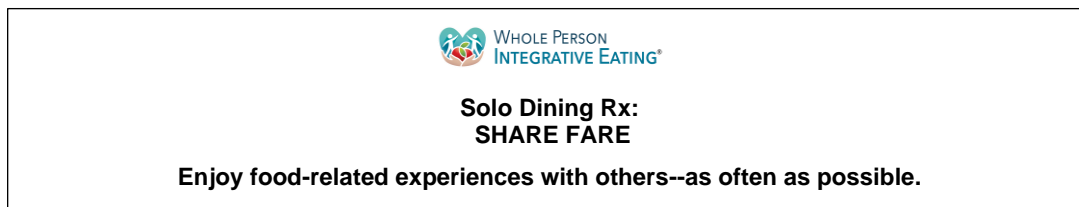
I agree. The studies we've looked at in this episode on the power of caring social interactions while eating versus the effect of Solo Dining and Loneliness on the metabolism of food suggest that social support impacts the way our bodies use our food—so much so that it has the power to halt the development of heart disease. Or it can influence whether we gain weight . . . or not.

Call it awareness, realization, or perception, the "consciousness" to which Chopra alludes implies a special sensibility—an invisible, hard-to-measure mystery—that somehow plays an essential and critical

role in the metabolism of food itself. And when this consciousness is miraculously activated, not only does it have the power to neutralize the metabolism of potentially artery-clogging cholesterol that we've consumed, but it may also protect us against becoming obese.

Such insights provide further support for the Whole Person Integrative Eating antidote to the Solo Dining overeating style I'm suggesting in this episode: *enjoy food-related experiences with others.*

Here is the Whole Person Integrative Eating (WPIE) antidote to the Solo Dining overeating style. It is the WPIE guideline for cultivating 'Social Nourishment' each time you eat:



And please consider this: The Roseto and rabbit studies tell us that this Whole Person Integrative Eating practice is more than just words or a generic guideline to follow; rather, state-of-the-art science suggests that enjoying food with others may provide a path to overcoming overeating and overweight and perhaps to other conditions linked to a "lonely heart."

Recipes for Social Nourishment

Here are some recipes, literal and figurative, for starting your own Social Nutrition traditions by turning a table for one into a table for two, three, or more.

There's also this to consider: I interpret the discouraging data about escalating Solo Dining, loneliness, and their link to weight gain as an opportunity to make small social changes while eating that have the potential to lead to big mind-body health and weight benefits.

As you'll see, these "Recipes for Social Nourishment" offer insights into initiating and integrating meaningful person-to-person interaction with acquaintances, friends, coworkers, or family members over a cup of coffee, a snack, or a full-fledged meal once or more throughout the day. Here are 3 ideas for you to get started. For more social-dining suggestions, please visit HealingSecretsPodcast.com, and open the 'In-Action' CTA next to the yellow light bulb for Episode 17.

Create an online, eating-with-others community. Given that more and more of us work from home or we're 'digital nomads,' consider connecting with others, online, for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Or whenever you take a coffee break or have a snack.

Set a friendship-flavored table. To imbue a meal with a soul-satisfying connection to others, consider orchestrating a café get-together or hosting a dinner at your place, then asking one special friend to ensure everyone is honored and enjoys the occasion by serving as the *tamada* toastmaster—the tradition we told you about at the start of the chapter. In this way, you and your friends are creating your own *tamada* ritual that encourages a welcoming and memorable dining experience for all. And now I'd like to make a *tamada* toast: to friendship-flavored food.

Dine with your pet. If you have a dog or cat or bird or other pet that you love and live with, consider enjoying a beverage or eating a meal the same time that your pet eats.

To review these strategies--as well as some others--please visit HealingSecretsPodcast.com, then open the 'In-Action' CTA next to the yellow light bulb for Episode 17.

Reset the American Table

Columnist and cookbook author Marion Cunningham has described Solo Dining and the other new-normal overeating styles I'm telling you about in each episode of *The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed*, as "going in, going out, then grabbing something to eat alone."

"When you eat this way, you don't create deep connections," said Cunningham during an interview I had the honor to do with her, "and you miss the opportunity to get to know about the people you're living with when you don't sit around the table and share yourself around food."

Continued Cunningham: "We're fed more than food when we eat with others. Instead of taking a solitary trip through life, when you dine with family you learn to share and care for others, as well as social skills, tradition, and ritual. Talk begins to flow, feelings are expressed, and a sense of well-being takes over." Such is the nourishment that beckons when we reset the American table.

Enjoy Food-Related Experiences with Others

Here's the bottom line: The antidote to the Solo Dining overeating style is to (1) take a cue from the *tamada* tradition of honoring each person at the dining table, (2) from the heart-disease-protection power gleaned from the Roseto social study, (3) and the eating-while-cared-for rabbit study.

As often as possible, enjoy a fresh meal, snack, or beverage with coworkers, family, or friends. In other words, follow the remedy for the Solo Dining overeating style by integrating the Whole Person Integrative Eating practice into your everyday meals: *enjoy food-related experiences with others*.

A brief coda...

I understand. As simple as the solution to the Solo Dining overeating style may seem, I know it can be a challenge to implement, given the demands of busy schedules and cell phones, pagers, and e-mail that can keep us on call twenty-four hours a day.

Still, perhaps the ancient social message in food writer Marion Cunningham's wisdom that "we're fed more than food when we eat with others" is worth considering: "It is one thing to eat," she said; "it is another to dine on lovingly prepared food with good friends." For when we do, not only is our appetite sated but body, mind, and soul too are nourished.

Your 'In-Action' Exercise

A tip, step, or reflection that can contribute to your success.

So you can reap the rewards of what you discover on each episode of *The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed*, I close each episode with an '**In-Action**' **Idea** for you to try. This may be a **Quick-Tip** about how to implement the healing secret of food we just discussed; or a **Practical Step** you can take, such as ordering a size-down of your favorite coffee concoction. Or perhaps I'll suggest a **Self-Insight Exercise**, an internal-reflection that can lead you closer to achieving your food-related health goals.

I'll offer an In-Action Exercise at the end each episode that can contribute to **your transformation from today's, 'new-normal' way of eating—which leads to overeating and overweight—to Whole Person Integrative Eating—which I describe as your** scientifically sound, personal guide to eating less and weighing less. Without dieting.

Consider keeping a *Healing Secrets of Food Revealed* journal to write about your experience with each In-Action Exercise.

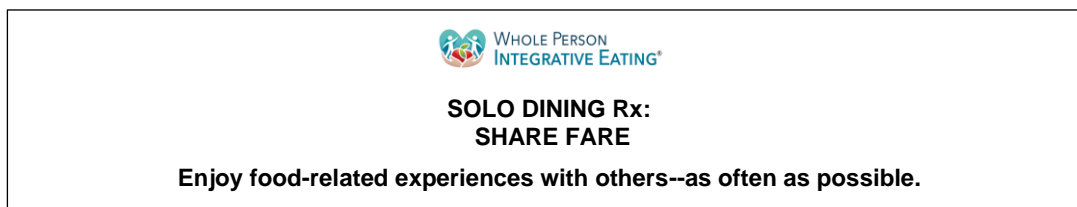
YOUR IN-ACTION EXERCISE SELF-INSIGHT REFLECTIONS

Today's In-Action Exercise are two Self-Insight Reflections.

SELF-INSIGHT REFLECTION #1:

CONSIDER, and REFLECT ON, THE WHOLE PERSON INTEGRATIVE EATING Rx to SOLO DINING

Here is the Whole Person Integrative Eating (WPIE) antidote to the Solo Dining overeating style. It is the WPIE guideline for cultivating connection with others each time you eat:

**SELF-INSIGHT REFLECTION #2:**

REVIEW THE 11 "Recipes for Social Nourishment" I created, then REFLECT ON THEM and DECIDE WHICH ONE(S) WORK FOR YOU.

(Find the 11 "recipes" at HealingSecretsPodcast.com, in the 'In-Action' CTA next to the yellow lightbulb.)

Recipes for Social Nourishment

Here are 11 recipes, literal and figurative, for starting your own Social Nutrition traditions by turning a table for one into a table for two, three, or more.

As you'll see, these "Recipes for Social Nourishment" offer insights into initiating and integrating meaningful person-to-person interaction with acquaintances, friends, coworkers, or family members over a cup of coffee, a snack, or a full-fledged meal once or more throughout the day.

There's also this to consider: I interpret the discouraging data about escalating Solo Dining, loneliness, and their link to weight gain as an opportunity to make small social changes while eating that have the potential to lead to big mind-body health and weight benefits.

Create an online, eating-with-others community. Given that more and more of us work from home or we're 'digital nomads,' consider connecting with others, online, for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Or whenever you take a coffee break or have a snack.

Set a friendship-flavored table. To imbue a meal with a soul-satisfying connection to others, consider orchestrating a café get-together or hosting a dinner at your place, then asking one special friend to ensure everyone is honored and enjoys the occasion by serving as the *tamada* toastmaster—the tradition we told you about at the start of the chapter. In this way, you and your friends are creating your own *tamada* ritual that encourages a welcoming and memorable dining experience for all. And now I'd like to make a *tamada* toast: to friendship-flavored food.

Make an old family recipe. Create your own multigenerational meal memories. Start a family tradition by inviting one or more family members over to enjoy a meal made using a recipe from an older member of your family—perhaps an aunt or uncle, parent, or cousin. Launch each meal by setting a glowing table with special ware.

Create a cooking club "family." Invite coworkers, friends, and community members with whom you interact—a librarian, neighbors, people who work in restaurants—to be part of your cooking club "family." Rotate meals at the homes of members. In the spirit of *tamada*, share meal memories and stories as you dine. Or consider creating an online cooking club!

Savor family-and-friend food. Consider placing a picture of a family- or friendship-filled dining experience on the table as you eat. If your mother used to make a special meal that you particularly enjoyed, make it for yourself on a weekend and freeze it, then let it defrost while you're at work one day

so you can enjoy it when you get home. As you enjoy the special memory-filled dish, reflect on your family members or beloved friends as you eat.

Collect family recipes. Prior to the latter half of the twentieth century, the recipes parents made for their families were often learned from *their* parents or other family members. Create your own culinary family tree and a connection to your food roots by putting together a collection of family recipes.

Have a multigenerational meal. Make a favorite recipe and then invite friends and family from different generations to come for an informal meal.

Create quick-fix family fare. If you're time pressured but you enjoy planning activities in advance, this is a unique way to create a family meal. Pick a day, set aside some time, and plan your meals for the week. Shop for ingredients and prep them all in advance, then place the prepped food in the freezer. When it's time to have one of the meals, both you and your family can assemble the ingredients and cook them together as the need arises. Voilà! Dinner is served.

Share a memory meal. Enjoy food with friends and family members even when you're dining alone. Just prior to eating, think of a family member, friend, or other person you admire or love, living or not. Eat your meal while holding their memory in your heart.

Dine with your pet. If you have a dog or cat or bird or other pet that you love and live with, consider enjoying a beverage or eating a meal the same time that your pet eats.

Choosing solo dining. There may be times when you simply need some solitude while eating. When you choose Solo Dining, consider eating in silence while focusing on your food. Close your eyes and then inhale and exhale slowly. Throughout the meal, eat from your heart (see chapter 7, "Appreciate Food," for tips for eating from the heart and connecting to food while you eat).

Thank you...

If you would like a summary of today's In-Action Exercise, please visit HealingSecretsPodcast.com. Then look for the yellow light bulb next to the "In-Action" CTA. At HealingSecretsPodcast.com, you can also listen to this episode again, and read the transcript and my Article about the WPIE Mindfulness Meal Meditation. And, please consider joining The Healing Secrets Podcast Community—where I'm looking forward to meeting you.

I want to thank you for joining me today on The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed. With each show, I'll share step-by-step, science-backed insights you need to nourish 'all of you' – body, mind, soul, and social well-being – each time you eat. So you can thrive.

I'm Deborah Kesten, host of The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed.

Until next week, BE NOURISHED.

Disclaimer: This transcript is for informational purposes only. This transcript is not intended to be a substitute for professional health or weight loss advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your health professional or another qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding your condition or well-being.