



Mindful Eating – Tips for Parents

There's a growing focus on the benefits of healthy eating. When kids (and adults) are feeling stress, it can lead to unhealthy eating. Over-eating, eating junk food, or eating high fat foods are common ways to mindlessly eat while feeling stressed.

There is significant research that suggests family meal time is critical to a child's well-being and can help your child perform better in school and even in social situations.

With busy schedules, it can be hard to have meals together every day. Some families try having breakfast together. Others commit to having dinner together a few times a week. Scheduling and having mealtime together can have benefits for everyone.

Suggestions for Mealtime

Keep the TV, smartphones, and other screens turned off and put away so the focus is on being together and the meal.

Have a "check in" before the meal and ask everyone to rate how hungry they are. Answers like, "I could eat everything," or, "I'm not really

hungry" can help kids develop an awareness of how their bodies feel.

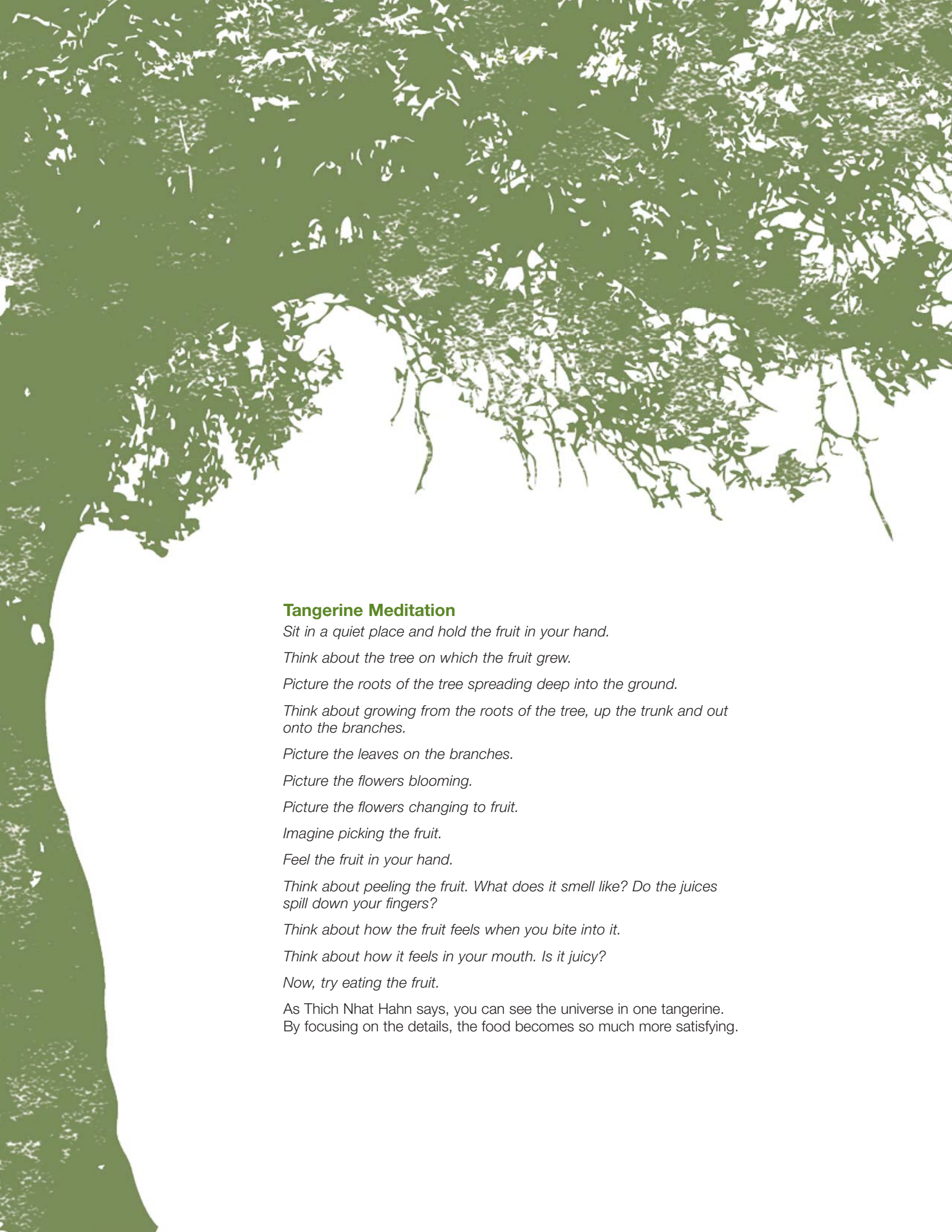
Set a goal to have everyone stop eating when they are about 75% full. If you eat until you feel full, then you probably over-ate. After dinner take a family walk.

Think about the difference between eating and eating for satisfaction. If your child isn't paying attention to what she's eating, she may eat an entire meal and not feel satisfied. Teaching her how to focus on the food she is eating and how it tastes, could leave her with feelings of satisfaction and appreciation of the meal. (See Tangerine Meditation below)

For those that are interested in creating a meditation, consider one from Thich Nhat Hanh the author of the mindfulness book *Peace in Every Step*.

This meditation is on the tangerine (though any fruit you have available would work). Don't actually eat the fruit during this meditation. Wait until after you've finished and you may be surprised at how good it actually tastes.

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Tangerine Meditation

Sit in a quiet place and hold the fruit in your hand.

Think about the tree on which the fruit grew.

Picture the roots of the tree spreading deep into the ground.

Think about growing from the roots of the tree, up the trunk and out onto the branches.

Picture the leaves on the branches.

Picture the flowers blooming.

Picture the flowers changing to fruit.

Imagine picking the fruit.

Feel the fruit in your hand.

Think about peeling the fruit. What does it smell like? Do the juices spill down your fingers?

Think about how the fruit feels when you bite into it.

Think about how it feels in your mouth. Is it juicy?

Now, try eating the fruit.

As Thich Nhat Hahn says, you can see the universe in one tangerine. By focusing on the details, the food becomes so much more satisfying.