How do individuals learn and apply brief mindfulness-based instructions for food cravings? A qualitative study.

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Introduction
- **Mindfulness**: Open and non-judgmental awareness of present-moment thoughts, feelings and sensations.
- **Decentering**: The metacognitive insight that one’s thoughts, feelings and experiences of physical sensations are transient mental events.
- **Study aims**: Explore individuals’ understanding and experience of learning and applying decentering instructions for food cravings.

Methods
- **Participants**: N = 10 (female = 8), non-meditators
- **Materials**: Two videos, each containing five highly attractive food images (e.g., brownie, burger)
- **Normal viewing instructions**: Viewing the foods in an unconstrained way
  - **metaphor**: letting the mind flow freely as a river
- **Decentering instructions**: Viewing the thoughts about food come up and go away
  - **metaphor**: standing behind the waterfall and observing the stream of water like a stream of thoughts pass by
- **Thematic Analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006), using NVivo software
- **Interview schedule**:
  - Experience of viewing the foods
  - Experience of listening to the instructions
  - Understanding and learning of the instructions
  - Application of the instructions to the food videos
  - Potential future use of the decentering instructions
  - Theoretical understanding of mindfulness

Procedure
- Consent & demographics
- Normal viewing instructions
- Decentering viewing instructions
- Interview
- Debriefing & payment

*Red dashed lines denote when the audio recording of the interview starts/ends.*
Thematic map of the participants’ responses

Legend:
- Orange: Main theme
- Blue: Subtheme
- Light blue: Aspect of a subtheme
- Green: Key finding
- Light orange: Interpretation

Tatiana: “using the metaphor as a comparison really helps.”

Eleanor: “I became more aware”

Learning and application of decentering instructions
- Application varied throughout the video
- Instructions appropriately challenging
- Having a structured task
- Visual metaphors
- Comparison with normal viewing instructions
- Discussion of instructions with the interviewer

Factors that facilitated understanding of instructions
- All viewing experiences changed

Normal viewing can increase awareness and be experienced as mindfulness
- Multi-stage process?

Eating simulations
- Present in all interviews
- Spontaneous
- Variability
- Online environment as a barrier

Potential application
- Spontaneous applications across domains
- Expected challenges
- Need-based
- Remembering to do it
- Effortful
- Finding time

Interpretation
Conclusion

• Food images led to eating simulations of varying intensity based on food preferences.

• Learning and applying brief mindfulness was facilitated by:
  • Instructions that were appropriately challenging, directive, and structured
  • Comparison with normal viewing instructions
  • Waterfall metaphor, and comparison of the two metaphors
  • Discussion of instructions with the interviewer (feedback)

• Learning and applying mindfulness may be a multi-stage process that involves feedback and an increased awareness of experience (see figure).

Implications: The importance of these factors in the development of effective interventions.

- Participants anticipated using the instructions in the future:
  • Based on need
  • Across various domains (e.g., stress)
  • Anticipated challenges: remembering, finding time, requires effort