**Mindful Eating – Conscious Living™: An acceptability study**

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**HEADLINES**

* **Mindful eating is a powerful and accessible intervention with many benefits.**
* **However, it’s not easy to learn, and needs to be delivered skilfully.**

**1) WHAT IS IT?**

* **ME-CL** is an 8-week mindfulness programme focused on food and eating.

**2) WHY RESEARCH IT?**

* ME-CL is sufficiently different to existing 8-week mindful eating programmes, such as MB-EAT and BEFree, as it targets the general population rather than those engaged in binge eating.
* It has yet to be put to clinical trial.
* Originating in the US, it is now being taught in many different countries – does it translate well in other cultural contexts?

**3) RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

* Is ME-CL an acceptable intervention for women in the UK?
* Is a UK ME-CL treatment manual needed?

**4) METHOD**

* Three focus groups of 12 women in the UK were given an overview of the programme and session plans for 2 of the 8 classes, plus an experience of a mindful eating exercise.
* Using Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis method, the transcriptions of the focus groups were coded from a critical realist and contextualist stance.
* An initial thematic map has now been generated, along with descriptions of each theme.

**5) INITIAL RESULTS**

1. THE POWER AND BENEFITS OF MINDFUL EATING: This theme speaks to the positive impacts of approaching eating more mindfully. These were wide-ranging, from improving eating behaviour to improving wellbeing and increasing joy.
   1. ME-CL IS ACCESSIBLE TO WOMEN IN THE UK: This sub-theme of ‘the power and benefits of mindful eating’ directly addresses the research questions. The data did not indicate a need for a separate UK manual.
2. MINDFUL EATING IS HARD: This is because the process of learning how to bring more mindful awareness to food and eating, while very powerful, can be very difficult, for practical and experiential reasons.
   1. IT’S NEVER JUST ABOUT EATING: Habitual eating behaviours are transmitted down generations within a societal context focused on a thin ideal.
3. MINDFUL EATING HAS TO BE DELIVERED WELL: Teachers need to be flexible and firm, sensitive and gently encouraging. Cultural competency is very important, so that American elements can be de-emphasised in favour of appropriate, local vocabulary.
4. MINDFUL EATING ISN’T ENOUGH: Developing the capacity to eat with more mindful awareness may be only part of the journey. Other important aspects could be improving nutritional knowledge and cooking skills.

**CONCLUSION:** ME-CL shows initial promise, but further research is needed to test its efficacy and feasibility.