



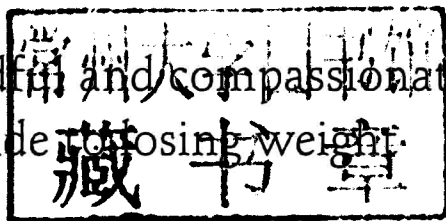
a mindful and compassionate  
guide to losing weight

# EATING WITH FIERCE KINDNESS

SASHA T. LORING,  
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guide to losing weight.



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NEW HARBINGER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

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Distributed in Canada by Raincoast Books

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New Harbinger Publications, Inc.  
5674 Shattuck Avenue  
Oakland, CA 94609  
www.newharbinger.com

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Cover design by Amy Shoup; Text design by Michele Waters-Kermes;  
Acquired by Melissa Kirk; Edited by Karen Stein

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Loring, Sasha T.

Eating with fierce kindness : a mindful and compassionate guide to losing weight / Sasha T. Loring.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-57224-927-1 (pbk.) -- ISBN 978-1-57224-930-1 (pdf ebook) 1.

Weight loss--Psychological aspects. 2. Compassion. 3. Kindness. I. Title.

RM222.2.L578 2010

613.2'5--dc22

2010037740



**Mixed Sources**  
Product group from well-managed  
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www.fsc.org Cert no. SWE-COC-000952  
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13 12 11.  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

“Highly experienced psychotherapist and mindfulness teacher Sasha Loring offers readers the best of the material she has garnered from her years of personal meditation. Changing our relationship to food is a long journey that begins with self-kindness. We all understand the need for information that helps people in their struggle with food. This book contains cutting-edge help presented in a nurturing and compassionate manner.”

—Anna Jedrzewski, *New Age Retailer* review

# Foreword

We eat for many reasons, and our relationship to food is deeply conditioned by a multitude of factors.

Besides the basic biological need for nourishment and knowledge of the basic nutritional value of different foods, those conditioning factors can also include our personal history with eating and food; the degree of self-awareness we have; the inner “scripts” we believe and follow about who we are; how worthy (or not worthy) we think we are; and how we have learned to relate eating to intense feelings ranging from pain to joy and celebration.

In each moment of activity involving food and eating, how we approach, take in, and relate to our food is being

actively shaped by a complex history of experience. The unfolding unconscious patterns in mind and body continue to be reinforced—in the present moment—as each meal progresses, unless and until one learns to recognize, manage, and transform the existing habit patterns.

When present and active, and when it is unrecognized and poorly understood, a deeply conditioned, dysfunctional relationship between food, eating, and one's inner landscape of thoughts and feelings has the power to warp the simple act of eating into an experience of unavoidable misery. The consequences of distorted habits of eating, thinking, and feeling often include endangered health, and obesity that is markedly refractory to diets and “quick fix” approaches.

As it turns out, very large numbers of people are affected by unhealthy patterns of eating and weight management. As a nation, we currently face a public health crisis of obesity—one that includes not only adults but alarmingly also extends to and includes our children.

How might one begin to shift from a dysfunctional and unhealthy relationship to food, eating, and weight management toward a relationship marked by confidence, happiness, enjoyment, and sustainable good health?

In this wise and powerful book, *Eating with Fierce Kindness: A Mindful and Compassionate Guide to Losing Weight*, Sasha Loring offers us the possibility for a satisfying relationship to food and to eating, and a path toward better health.

For many reasons, it is a joy for me to introduce you to her and to this book.

I have known Sasha for many years, as a friend, a colleague, and a meditation student and teacher.

She has devoted herself—with an incredible “fierce kindness” of her own—to understanding the inner life and what it means to be a human being, by diving deeply into the world of meditation, using methods like the mindfulness and loving-kindness practices she teaches here.

Sasha has also developed and committed her professional energies for many years to helping others, as a psychotherapist specializing in mindful eating and weight management.

As you will quickly discover from reading and working with her guidance in this book, Sasha is an experienced, keen, and effective teacher of meditation methods and ways to help you transform your relationship to eating and food.

At the core of Sasha’s message are two elements: the importance of developing mindfulness in your life, moment by moment; and the crucial role of intentionally nurturing a compassionate relationship with yourself, and especially your habits and reactions around food and eating.

Mindfulness and compassion are central to the work many people are doing currently in a wide-ranging spectrum of health interventions that includes integrative medicine, stress reduction programs, psychotherapy practices, relapse prevention for addictions, and care at the end of life.

Mindfulness is an awareness that arises when you pay attention on purpose in a nonjudging and receptive way to

experiences, including inner life experiences, happening in the present moment.

It is a basic human potential, already present in you. Mindfulness occurs naturally in everyone (although it is not expressed to the same degree in each person), and it can actually be measured in an individual using psychological tests currently available.

And, most important, mindfulness can be cultivated and strengthened through intentional practice, which is why actually doing the practices in this book is so important!

A growing body of scientific data supports the practice of mindfulness for greater health and happiness, and for increasing one's capacity to deal with even the most challenging situations of living.

For example, recent studies have begun to explain how the practice of mindfulness can affect one's emotional and physical health in positive ways. According to the research, many of the benefits of mindfulness are related to how the brain and nervous system reshape and redefine themselves during mindfulness practice, and effectively build new connections that support emotional intelligence, working memory, resiliency, and well-being.

In a very real and realizable sense, by actively engaging with the practices in this book—"practicing" with the practices—you will be using your brain in new ways, and giving your mind, brain, and body the opportunity to experience new possibilities for relating to food, for growing self-awareness, and for enjoying better health.



In the end, the practices and lessons here form a powerful combination that anyone, regardless of whether they struggle with food or weight, might benefit from. After all, doesn't everyone have a personal and particular relationship to food? When we look deeply, mindfully, moment by moment, don't we all bring complex patterns of personal history, self-view and self-narrative, and psychological and physical reactivity forward in response to the simple act of eating?

So, whatever your interest or motivations, I encourage you to dive deeply into *Eating with Fierce Kindness* with an attitude of curiosity and exploration.

If you allow yourself to be informed and amazed by tapping the possibility for increased self-awareness and self-compassion that already exists within you, you will likely find yourself taking charge of your life in new ways, and transforming your relationship to food, eating, and weight management.

And, you just might find that life somehow becomes more rewarding and enjoyable than you had ever allowed yourself to hope or imagine!

—Jeffrey Brantley, MD, DFAPA

# Acknowledgments

I feel very fortunate for the support I've been given regarding this book. I have benefited greatly from the many meditation teachers I have studied with who have devoted their lives to training others. I deeply appreciate my editors, Melissa Kirk and Jess Beebe, for their astute and patient guidance. I'm very grateful to my friends Mary and Jeff Brantley for their companionship on the path of meditation and to Jeff for writing the foreword to this book. Ruth Wolever has been a great help in offering me opportunities to work in the field of obesity research, and Janna Fikkan, Barbara Culbertson, Jeanne van Gemert, Ron Vereen, Maya McNealy, Kara Mitchell, and Lauren McDonald have been wonderful teaching partners

at Duke Medical Center. Finally, much gratitude for their ongoing support and love goes to my family, Mimi, Murray, Arthur, Vicki, and Sondra Loring, and Janice, Mike, and Isabella Rogers-Trisolini. May all of you be happy!

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# Introduction

As a psychotherapist and mindfulness teacher, I have worked with hundreds of men and women struggling with a troubled relationship with food. Sometimes this struggle has historical roots, and sometimes it stems from current challenges. Whatever the source of your own struggles, this book will be beneficial to you if you feel challenged, uncomfortable, or despairing regarding how you relate to food and eating, and you want to lay the foundation for attaining and maintaining a healthy weight. The guidance I provide in this book comes from my many years of working with people individually as well as in group classes and workshops. The content arises from all that I have gained from making meditation

an important and consistent focus of my life. What is offered here also comes out of my own struggles with self-critical attitudes and anxiety, and the ways I have had to apply the lessons offered in this book to myself in my own life. We can all benefit from learning new ways to speak to and listen to our own hearts.

This book is about how to use kindness as a way of cultivating the “ground” of your mind, so that when the seeds of change are planted they have a warm and nourishing environment in which to grow and flourish. Joanne, a participant in one of my classes, spent eight weeks practicing the methods described in this book and summarized what she had learned, saying, “I am somebody.” By this she meant, “I count too, I’m worthy of respect, I have talents I want to express, and I can appreciate my strengths rather than being held down by my weaknesses.” She had learned to have compassion for all of those unwanted parts of herself, and she had gained a new willingness to appreciate herself as lovable, even with her imperfections. With changes in attitude such as these, turning the mind and the body toward a healthy weight becomes much easier and is likely to be more successful in the long run.

Two forms of experiential learning are provided in this book: exercises and practices. The exercises will help you clarify what you are doing now that may be sabotaging your success with weight loss or weight maintenance. The practices offer a way of gradually moving yourself toward increased psychological and physical health. This book provides a way

of looking into your everyday patterns around food with an attitude of kindness and self-care rather than restriction and withholding. You are your own “expert” because of all the various approaches to becoming healthy that you have already tried. This is an opportunity to take a fresh look as well as to make a fresh start. The journey through this book is meant to be a resource for the long term and takes time; you might spend a day on some of the practices and a few weeks on others.

Part I of this book will help you recognize the breadth and power of self-kindness. You will gain more clarity about how the “diet mentality” and the tendency to be self-critical do not provide the changes in both thinking and action that are needed for long-term success. Part II, on self-awareness, describes how mindfulness illuminates habitual mental patterns and decreases sabotaging self-talk. You will learn skills that can have a positive impact on many areas of your life, including relationships, self-care, and mental and physical health. You will find a chapter devoted to looking more closely at the “wanting” mind itself, which usually goes unnoticed but has a powerful influence on our actions. The chapter on reducing emotional reactivity can guide you to recognize the signs and consequences of negative emotions and in developing an inner harmony.

A rich array of information and guided experiences are presented in Part III, “Fierce Kindness Practices for Transforming Your Relationship with Food.” You will begin reclaiming your body as a support and foundation



for well-being; increase your experiential understanding of hunger, fullness, and satisfaction; gain a new appreciation of the role of your senses regarding health; and become much more mindful about food and eating.

You might want to write notes to yourself, either in the book or in a journal, as a reminder of what has worked well, or of places you want to revisit another time. However you choose to proceed, remember to appreciate and build on any small successes that take you in a direction you want to go, and to be patient with yourself. Changing your lifestyle will be an accumulation of small steps over time.

My heartfelt wish for you is that you have great success on this journey toward mental and physical health, and enjoy each step of the way!