

The associations of mindful eating domains with depressive symptoms and depression in three European countries

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Lay summary

Nutrition is likely to influence the development of depression, but other factors like obesity, the social environment and practices and routines around eating might be involved as well. Mindful eating, which is eating with awareness and attention, might be one of the food-related behaviour factors that is associated with depression.

This study was the first to investigate associations of mindful eating with depressive symptoms and depression. We used data from 1522 people from Denmark, 1512 people from Spain and 1439 people from the Netherlands. Four mindful eating domains were measured with the Mindful Eating Behaviour Scale (MEBS; Winkens et al., under revision). Depressive symptoms were measured with the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). Someone was classified as having depression when they scored above the clinically relevant cut-off score on the CES-D, and/or used antidepressants, and/or received psychological treatment.

Higher scores on the mindful eating domains Focused Eating, Eating with Awareness, and Eating without Distraction were associated with a lower level of depressive symptoms and a lower likelihood of having depression in the Danish, Spanish and Dutch samples. In contrast to expectations, a lower score on the mindful eating domain Hunger and Satiety Cues, which was only measured in the Dutch sample, was associated with a lower level of depressive symptoms. Hunger and Satiety Cues was furthermore not associated with depression.

In conclusion, this study suggests that mindful eating plays a role in mental well-being by consistently showing associations between three mindful eating domains and depression in samples from three European countries. Future studies should investigate possible mechanisms that might explain these associations.