



# Practice the Five Strengths, the Condensed Heart Instruction



**Jenna Hollenstein**

MS, RDN, CDN

Many wish to practice mindfulness techniques, such as mindful eating, but few are clear on how to move toward that end. Setting an intention reframes a goal by redirecting the focus from a desired outcome to the underlying tone and value of the process. To keep a mindful eating intention front-of-mind, one of my favorite frameworks is adapted from the Lojong slogan, “Practice the five strengths, the condensed heart instruction.”

## The five strengths are:

1. Strong determination
2. Familiarization
3. Seeds of virtue
4. Reproach
5. Aspiration

We practice **strong determination** when we set our intention and reaffirm our commitment to it every morning. At the end of each day, we revisit that intention, noting with non-judgmental curiosity what allowed us to maintain it and what made that difficult.

**Familiarization** requires we turn toward our cycles of mindlessness, chaotic eating, busyness, and whatever else distracts us and derails our ability to work with our thoughts, feelings, and sensations authentically as they arise. We develop compassion for ourselves and our habits when we recognize that they didn’t come out of nowhere, and at some point, they probably “worked” in one way



or another. Seeing our cycles with fresh eyes lets us examine where we are in real time and make different choices.

**Seeds of virtue** represent the seemingly minor ways in which we support our intention through our thoughts, words, and actions: noting our self-critical thoughts and responding to them with self-compassion, responding to diet talk with a description of your experience with mindful eating, and choosing to make your eating environment pleasant and conducive by putting away your phone are all seeds planted in the hope of harvesting greater mindfulness.

When we practice **reproach**, we spot obstacles to maintaining our intention and work with them. These often come in the form of habitual cycles of mindless or chaotic eating. Reproach helps us identify and overcome barriers to our mindful eating practice. Busy

schedules, putting others’ needs first, multitasking, and other commonplace scenarios in modern life can be spotted as they arise and worked with skillfully. This does not have to be perfect to be beneficial.

Finally, with **aspiration** we dedicate the merit of our efforts to the benefit of all beings, perhaps with a special wish for those who also hope to prioritize a mindful eating practice. We dedicate merit to them knowing the benefits of the journey will surely extend far beyond their relationship with food. For a worksheet and the opportunity to practice these concepts, see below.

*Jenna Hollenstein, MS, RDN, CDN, is a non-diet nutrition therapist, meditation instructor, and author of Eat to Love: A Mindful Guide to Transforming Your Relationship with Food, Body, and Life. She can be reached at [jenna@jennahollenstein.com](mailto:jenna@jennahollenstein.com).*