



Emotional Eating - May 2011

In this months issue

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Emotional eating

Food of Life

Statistics show there are over a million women in the UK suffering from some form of eating disorders ranging from mild to severe. How does this happen when food is our source of life and it is there to be enjoyed not dreaded.

Food goes alongside nurturing and love, when we celebrate it is often done with food and friends. When we fall in love we can lose our apatite but when we want to show our loved ones how we feel we prepare meals with love and attention to detail.

When a relationship breaks done then sorrow can either make people eat too little or too much, the associations of foods with pleasure and pain gives us clues about how we feel.

For some woman food becomes a daily obsession especially when you are addicted to weight loss or struggle to control complex emotions that are often rooted in childhood through food, but for others this may turn into a full-blown eating disorder.

Emotional eaters may eat when bored (as a means of entertainment), when upset (instead of facing difficult emotions), or when generally dissatisfied with life (to fill a void). All these extra calories add up, especially when the grazing fare is junk food instead of carrot sticks.

Do you eat in response to hunger or feelings?

So what is the reason that many people especially woman fear food and how much of it is inextricably bound up with our identity?

We set ourselves goals when it comes to food and if we keep to the goals we tell ourselves we have been 'Good' like praising a child, we then may reward ourselves for being good with the very thing we have been depriving ourselves of! (Food).

If we've been 'Bad' a sense of failure, not good enough, we then punish ourselves for perceived weaknesses by reaching for what we crave: cakes, chocolate, biscuits, junk foods to fulfill a need in us at that moment - like an addiction.

You experience the highs but then there are the lows, the void, the guilt and the self-loathing that we have once again repeated the pattern. This intensifies, and the destructive eating and yo-yo dieting continues.

So are you eating because you are hungry or are your feelings driving your need for food?

When did you establish this pattern of eating?

- When did food become a comfort for you and what is it replacing in your life?

Here are some of the reasons:

Stress

Some people deal with the stresses of life in a positive way, but others allow the stress to dominate their lives. When a person is under continual chronic stress their Cortisol levels increase, known as "the stress hormone." Cortisol has a beneficial function in the body, but excessive levels of Cortisol can cause a cascade of problems, creating cravings for sweet foods and excess weight gain.

We were built to handle acute stress (an immediate perceived threat) as in "fight & flight" not chronic stress (prolonged unresolved stressors).

Childhood habits

Often it can develop from well-meaning parents who may have their own issues with weight and misplace them onto the child by saying things that constantly refer to weight and size in a negative way - "you look fat in that dress or your getting a big tummy."

Or maybe you were forced to finish every bit of food on your plate even though you were full up.

Or food was given as a reward when you were good and deprived when you were naughty.

Forcing a child to follow a diet from a young age can start a vicious cycle, it can also confuse the body's signals for being full which may in turn lead to eating disorders. If a child is constantly getting negative mixed messages about food they will become confused and suffer with a lack of self-esteem, which becomes compounded during puberty.

Stuffing Emotions:

Another reason that many people eat is to avoid uncomfortable emotions: anger, fear, anxiety, sadness & guilt. People who are uncomfortable with confrontation may deal with frustrations in their marriage with a piece of cake, for example, rather than with open communication. Food can take the focus off these emotions.

While there are many reasons for emotional eating, and it's has become prevalent in our society, it's not necessarily good for us, as anyone who's watching their weight will tell you. If you're an emotional eater, it's important for you to be aware of the triggers, and to start taking control of your feelings, which drives this behaviour.

Here are some tips for you to consider!

Face your problems - think about what it is you are not dealing with in your life. You maybe using food to hide your feelings in a difficult relationship, loneliness or in a job you hate, seek help and talk to someone who can help you to work through the difficulties - **Life Coaching**.

Keeping a diary - Get into the habit of always asking yourself if you're really hungry when you're reaching for food. If you find that your hunger is more emotional than physical, take a few minutes to explore the feelings behind the pangs. Write it down and keep a diary, this has shown to be a very effective tool in dealing with emotions, brainstorming solutions, and enhancing overall health.

Find ways of relaxing - take time out for yourself, have a massages, or some reflexology or find other relaxing things to do - walk in the park, listen to some music.

Find some healthier food choices - if you feel like snacking, make some healthier choices - fruit, raw vegetables, nuts, seeds, dried fruit, oatcakes, hummus.

Learn to say NO - Free up some time and learn to say no to all new commitments. Sometimes it feels uncomfortable to say no but with a little practice, you'll do it easily and quickly without thinking.

Practice some breathing exercises - Breathing exercises are a great way to relieve stress anytime and anywhere. They're simple to learn, simple to use, and can be done on the spot when you feel tension, immediately helping you to feel better. One very effective exercise is to 'inhale peace' and 'exhale your stress'

Develop a Positive attitude - Optimists and positive thinkers experience better health, less stress, and more 'luck' in life. While it takes a little practice to develop a more positive frame of mind, the practice takes little extra time and can really change your whole experience of life and how you live it.