

‘Desserts’ is
‘stressed’ spelled
backwards

HOT TOPIC

FACE YOUR STUFF OR STUFF YOUR FACE

Emotional eating is commonplace. Susan Papazian explains why it happens and how we can stop it.

FOOD SPEAKS A UNIVERSAL language of its own. It connects and brings people together, and it nurtures, comforts and gives us life. Yet for many of us, we are at constant war with it.

Most of us can recall, at least one time in our lives, having stuffed our faces so much we had to lie down on the couch for relief. However, when overeating becomes habitual, it can be considered a problem.

We are at risk of emotional eating when we fail to build a healthy relationship between our bodies and food and/or if we become detached from our feelings and needs.

So how about we take a look at what we might be hiding behind every bite.

“In the land of wine and brie, obesity is relatively rare. We don't obsess about food, we're friends with it.” – Mirelle Guiliano

from *French Women Don't Get Fat*

STUFFED BUT EMPTY

Often, we try to resolve or relieve our problems with food. Unfortunately, we usually don't find the answers in the bottom of an ice cream tub or in the handful of salty crumbs left in the corner of the potato chip bag. The practice may leave us feeling full, but deep down on the inside, we usually still feel empty.

A yearning to eat can often be mistaken for genuine hunger, so when you next head to the pantry ask yourself: are you eating because you are hungry; or do you want to meet other needs such as security, love, acceptance, nurturing or protection? Or, perhaps, you are attempting to relieve a sense of boredom or create a distraction for a few minutes?

Whatever your reason, eating when you are not truly hungry tends to be a subconscious strategy to achieve a false sense of fulfilment. The worst thing is that the emotional need we are trying to fulfil can be exacerbated after the binge, because we still feel hurt, lonely, bored or empty; only now we also have Twistie fingers to show for it!

Emotional eating like this can lead to us punishing ourselves with food, for example, bullying ourselves into denying our body of certain foods. As a result, on and off the fad diets we go, riding the diet merry-go-round and/or treating our bodies with disrespect. Instead, we should really be trying to identify what needs we were trying to meet in the first place.

PUT A LID ON IT

Putting a lock on the refrigerator door may be good in theory, but what's a more realistic and achievable way to permanently stop emotional eating and weight gain?

Choosing a time-inspired goal can be a great motivator. For example, aiming to lose weight for a special occasion such as a wedding, holiday or school

DITCH THE GUILT

Always be kind to yourself and enjoy food without attaching guilt or shame. If you feel bad about eating something in particular but you absolutely must consume it, then reduce your portion size.

Susan Papazian

Susan is a senior personal trainer, based at Fitness First Dee Why (NSW). She is a CHEK Holistic Lifestyle Coach Level I and an accredited 12-week body transformation coach. Susan teaches her clients the key foundations towards optimal health and how a healthy body and mind is the first step to creating the ideal body shape. Susan can be contacted by phoning 0417 270277 or emailing spapazian@dodo.com.au

reunion. When you have a time-related goal like this, your emotional dependency on food can be more easily cast aside because you have a more tangible reason to eat well. But, of course, once the event comes and goes we still need to be able to stay on track.

STEPS TO CONTROL EMOTIONAL EATING

* Learn to recognise true hunger. Is your hunger physical or emotional? If you're not hungry, allow a few moments for the cravings to pass.

* Know your triggers. Look out for eating patterns. Write down when you eat, how much and what you eat over a few days and be aware of how you are feeling before and after every meal. You may see some negative eating patterns emerge.

* Look elsewhere for comfort. Talk to a friend before you talk to that chocolate bar. Take a walk, see a movie, be surrounded by loved ones if something is causing you stress.

* Don't keep a cupboard full of unhealthy foods in the house. Make sure when you go shopping you go on a full stomach, you are more likely to avoid the junk foods.

* Eat right for your metabolic type to avoid unnecessary hunger pangs and sugar cravings. Eater smaller meals more frequently.

* Exercise regularly and get plenty of rest. Your mood is more manageable you're your body can fight stress better when it is fit and well rested.

The secret to successfully – and permanently – avoiding the emotional eating cycle is to build a healthy relationship with your body and, most importantly, with your mind. Your pain and negative emotions are only alive for as long as you keep them alive in your thoughts, so by not focusing on past hurts, anger or resentments and by avoiding dwelling on worries about the future you can end the cycle.

By identifying and connecting with your feelings and needs, you will become more aware of the food choices you are making and, hopefully, choose more positive selections in the future.

