



Breaking Free from Emotional Eating

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One of the most complex relationships we have does not involve another person but rather, it involves our relationship to food. We each have a relationship to food that can be beneficial and promote good health or it can be harmful and destructive to our health. For some, food is a companion that is present in times of celebration, times of stress, as a way to connect in social situations, a way to escape negative emotions or times of boredom. There is an emotional connection to food which greatly impacts our health.

The most important part of lifestyle choices are food choices. Why is this important? According to the American Heart Association, the American Diabetic Association, the Center for Disease Control, and the American Cancer Society, lifestyle choices are the most significant factor in determining whether or not we will acquire a chronic disease.

So how do emotional connections to food impact our health? We each have patterns of acting and reacting; our relationship to food is no different. Whenever we have a harmful relationship to food, the following pattern is common. It frequently begins with a stressor that triggers the reaction. The stressor can be an unkind comment, a disappointment, an argument with a loved one, a financial setback, and job loss, death of a loved one, an accident or another meaningful happening.

The negative thinking that often ensues can lead to harmful actions including overeating, restricted eating, bingeing or other unwholesome food choices. An example of a poor food choice is when a person who has diabetes knowingly eats something that will raise his or her blood sugar level. Another example is a person with a gluten sensitivity choosing to eat food containing gluten. Both situations lead to chemical reactions in the body, negatively impacting their health.

Eating something that is harmful to a person's health commonly leads to feelings of guilt and shame. If he or she is not careful, a vicious cycle of negative thinking, destructive behavior, and feelings of guilt and shame can develop.

The good news is that none of us needs to be stuck in this harmful cycle, we can each break free from emotional eating and from the guilt and shame surrounding it.

Breaking free from emotional eating begins with an awareness of our triggers, eating patterns and learning alternatives to eating emotionally.

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