

Title:

Food Addiction

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Summary:

Food addicts crave the comfort that a particular food gives them. They also may engage in binge eating. Their cravings for food may be both physical and psychological.

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Food Addiction: A Craving You Can't Seem to Control

You may overdose on potato chips or tortilla chips once in a while, but would you consider yourself to be a food addict? The answer is important, because it could be the key to determining what course of action you need to take in order to lose weight. A number of medical experts say that food addiction is just as serious as nicotine or cocaine addiction—and can potentially be just as deadly.

When you suffer from food addiction, you have an overwhelming desire for a particular food. The desire is so strong, in fact, that if you are unable to consume that food, you suffer from withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, nausea, and depression. Food addicts crave the comfort that a particular food gives them. They also may engage in binge eating. Their cravings for food may be both physical and psychological.

It should be pointed out that there are different varieties of food addiction. For instance, there is compulsive overeating, where an individual goes on eating binges that can last several days. The addict may sometimes lose weight, but tends to gain it back again. Symptoms include eating quickly, compulsively eating alone, and eating when there is no evidence of hunger.

Yet another form of addiction is bulimia, in which an individual overeats, then purges either by vomiting or by taking laxatives. Signs of this condition include isolating oneself when eating, trying to consume huge portions of food rapidly, and being preoccupied with one's weight.

Food addiction can also come in the form of anorexia, where an individual attempts to starve oneself in order to achieve an unrealistic weight. Anorexics tend to be 15 percent below normal body weight and have a phobia about being fat. They have difficulty eating with other people and appear to be obsessed with weight. They may engage in ritualistic behavior involving food and may suffer from depression.

The good news is that food addiction can be successfully treated. This treatment can come in a variety of forms. A food addict may work with a psychotherapist to develop new ways to deal with food and his or her emotions. The therapist might be able to identify the source of the individual's fear or anger—the reason behind the individual's addiction. In the majority of cases, the psychologist will help the individual to develop a treatment plan which spells out expectations and goals, both for the short-term and the long-term. In the most serious cases, an individual may have to undergo in-patient treatment at a psychological facility. Treatment often involves helping the individual to return to healthy eating methods, dealing with the underlying emotional causes of addiction, and learning effective coping techniques.

Food addicts often follow the tenets of the same kind of 12-step program used by alcoholics. This involves admitting their powerlessness over food, their belief that they could be restored to sanity, and an admission of their faults and failings. In addition, food addicts often draw strength from support groups made up of people who have similar difficulties dealing with food. Just knowing that there are other people who face the same challenges can be incredibly therapeutic.

It is unclear at this point whether food addiction is a genetically-based illness. Certainly, however, there is evidence of eating patterns being passed down from one generation to the next. In fact, many food addicts may only seek help after they have determined that their illness could adversely affect their children.

It is entirely possible that a food addiction can never be cured, that it can only be treated. In other words, the recovery period for the addiction can last a lifetime. However, one should never lose hope of beating a food addiction. With patience and with time, individual addicts can learn the behavioral skills which will enable them to keep their weight under control. Of course, there will be times when individuals will be tempted to indulge in sweets or excessive carbohydrates. However, knowing the pain that they will undergo if they continue their harmful eating habits could be just the incentive they need to stay the course.

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