



SOULFUL LIVING

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Food Addiction

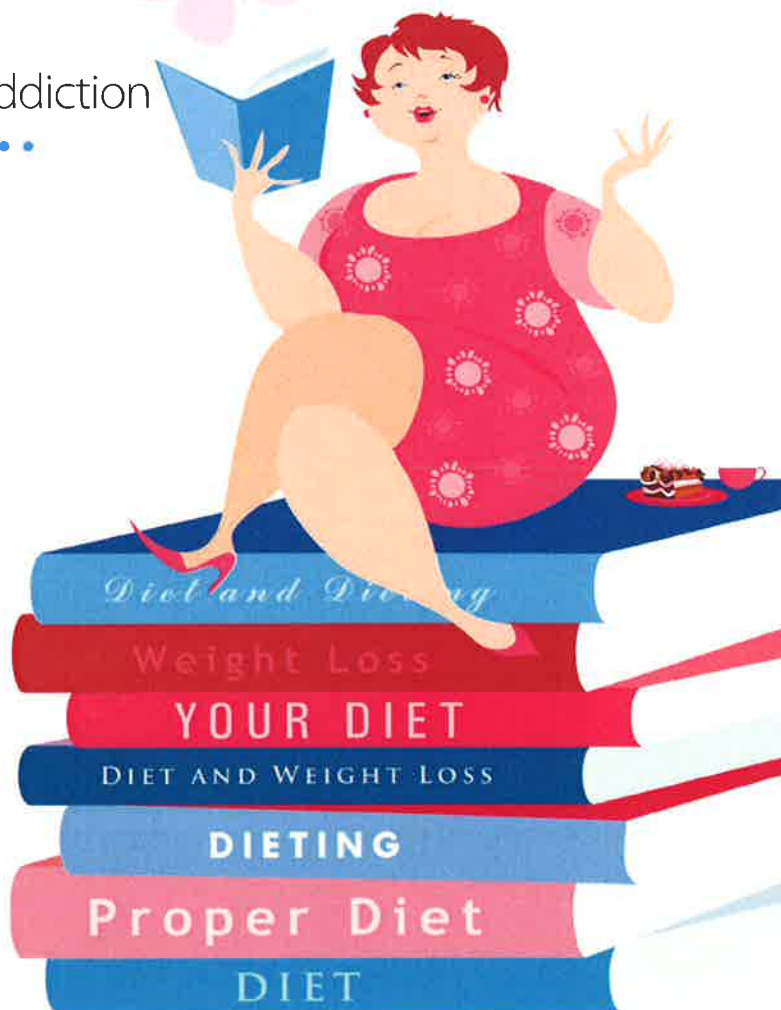


I've never met anyone who has maintained long term weight loss whose only goal was the number on the scale. In order to sustain the lifestyle changes necessary to have a healthy slender body, your motivation has to be greater than a number. You must value the freedom that results from making peace with your body and food more than you value the taste of a donut! Those who have a strong desire to live a joyful, healthy, peaceful life are the most successful in moving from living in the insanity of food obsession to the serenity of a healthy relationship with food and weight. This is because a highly respected and well-nourished body is the foundation upon which such a life must be built. However, many people do not understand that what they eat directly affects their every experience. Do You? Take some time to think about how your weight and relationship with food affect the following areas of your life.

PHYSICAL HEALTH: Are you overweight? Do you have heart disease, diabetes, shortness of breath, sleep apnea, decreased energy, or chronic joint pain? Are there other ways that your weight and food consumption affect you physically?

EMOTIONAL HEALTH: Do you harshly judge yourself; feel shame, guilt, anger or self-hatred in relation to your weight or what you eat? Do you experience periods of depression because of your inability to control your eating behavior? Do you ever feel anxious if you do not have certain foods available to you?

FINANCES: How much money do you spend on food that you use for bingeing, overeating, or stuffing uncomfortable feelings? How much money have you spent on diet books, diet supplements, diet foods, consultations with weight loss professionals, and seldom used exercise equipment and gym memberships? Do you miss time at work because of health problems related to how you eat? Do you believe your weight prevents you from getting a promotion or new job? Are there times that you are not as productive at your job because of how you feel (emotionally or physically) in relation to what you did or did not eat?



RELATIONSHIPS: Do you use your weight as an excuse to avoid relationships? Or, conversely, have you ever stayed in an unhealthy relationship because you believed no one else would want someone your size? Are people in your life inconvenienced by your food related emotional or physical problems? When you eat foods that zap your energy or make you feel ill, are you sometimes nasty, short, or cranky with family, friends, or co-workers?

SEXUAL EXPERIENCES: Does your weight physically or emotionally prevent you from having a satisfying sex life?

MENTAL CLARITY: Do you ever feel a bit dull or foggy in the brain because of the quantity or quality of food you eat?

ACTIVITIES: Does your weight physically or emotionally

prevent you from engaging in healthy, fun activities like hiking, bike riding, swimming, dancing, or playing with your children? Are simple activities of daily living like putting on your socks and shoes becoming increasingly difficult? Do you avoid certain social situations because you don't want to be seen at your current weight or because you are afraid you will overeat?

TIME: How much time do you spend thinking about food or weight issues? How old were you when you first thought you had a problem with food or weight? How many years have you been dealing with this? How many precious moments of your life have you lost to your preoccupation with food and weight?

The purpose of answering the preceding questions is to not elicit feelings of self-blame or harsh self-judgment, but rather to increase your awareness of how your current weight and eating behaviors may be preventing you from living a normal, productive life. Understanding that what you eat affects your every physical, emotional, and mental experience can serve to increase your motivation to cultivate a healthy relationship with food.

If you are still riding the yo-yo dieting roller coaster, you may have an addictive relationship with food. Addiction, as defined by Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary, is "the persistent compulsive use of a substance known by the user to be physically, psychologically, or socially harmful".

Sound familiar? Studies have shown that compulsive overeating and drug addiction share many of the same biological characteristics. For instance, when people eat large quantities of sugar and fat they develop a tolerance for these substances and need more sugar and fat to satisfy them, much like alcoholics and drug addicts who, over time, require increased amounts of alcohol and drugs to get high. Other research has revealed that many obese people and drug addicts have a lower number of dopamine receptors (the feel good receptors) in their brains, which make them more likely to crave things that boost dopamine like sugar, alcohol, cocaine or heroin. Also, when some people are suddenly cut off from sugar and certain carbohydrates they experience withdrawal symptoms like anxiety, depression, irritability and strong cravings for the substance from which they are cut off, just like alcoholics and drug addicts do when they are detoxifying from alcohol or drugs.

However, neither acknowledging the depth to which your relationship with food is negatively affecting your life nor understanding the biology of addiction will in and of itself cure your obsession or right your relationship with food.

You may be thinking, "Well I know how to eat well and what I need to do to lose weight." Do you really? The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. How many times have you gone on a diet proclaiming, "This is it! I will never again be overweight! My eating behaviors have forever changed!!" only to find yourself starting a new diet the following Monday morning? Three, four, five or more times? Sounds like insanity to me! You may know how to diet and temporarily lose weight, but you have not made the internal psychological and emotional shifts necessary to sustain a healthy relationship with food and permanent weight loss. Moving from the insanity of a food and weight obsessed life to the serenity of a loving and respectful relationship with food requires the willingness to consider a new way of thinking and being in the world.

For many it requires learning to live a spiritual life.

Cultivating a relationship with your Authentic Self, looking at yourself through kind and compassionate eyes, being willing to listen to and act on the guidance you receive from your Inner Knowing, and understanding that your true essence is pure love are all part of nurturing your spiritual self. As you mature spiritually, behaviors that no longer serve you well fall by the way side.

On page 15 of "A Course in Weight Loss" Marianne Williamson writes: "Spiritual growth is a fascinating process if you allow it to be. It is an inner journey from one insight to another, in which helpful realizations fall into place as you are ready to receive them. Twisted thoughts become untwisted once you see them for what they are. Your journey from blindness to spiritual vision precedes your journey from dysfunctional eating to a healthy and wholesome relationship to food; in fact, it is a necessary prerequisite for it. As you understand more deeply the roots of your weakness you lay the foundation for the cultivation of new strengths." ●

To be continued...



about louisa...

Louisa Latela is a psychotherapist in Haddonfield, NJ She is a My Self Design Program Provider and offers in person, telephone, and web-based counseling. She is the author of the e-workbook "Live Your Highest Good: Make Peace with Your Body and Food" www.liveyourhighestgood.com. If you have questions, or would like to share your experiences of living soulfully as a result of your relationship with food Louisa would love to hear from you. Call 856.429.9799 or email: louisa@louisalatela.com.