

JUST STOP OVEREATING... BUT IT'S COMPLICATED!



Are you a binge-eater, binge-drinker, do you suffer from post-binge guilt or frustration or frequently wake up with the dreaded "food coma"? Do we just need more willpower and self-control? Why is it so hard to break this cycle and just live "happily ever after" on a healthy eating plan?

First of all, it's important to understand the "physiology" of overeating. With more than 2/3 of the U.S. adult population overweight or obese, it's clear that our present behavior of bingeing-dieting is not working. How does overeating even happen? Is it our appetite or our hunger that drives this overeating behavior? Appetite is considered more like the desire to eat while hunger is more like a need to eat. Hunger drives us to eat breakfast after 8 hours of fasting (while sleeping). Appetite is more like the desire to eat a piece of cake after a full dinner. Regardless, both of these behaviors are driven by the neuroendocrine system. Simply put, this involves your gut (which is the largest endocrine organ in the body), several hormones and your brain.

Research shows that when your stomach is empty, it releases the hormone, ghrelin, AKA the "hunger hormone". Ghrelin is also made in the intestines and kidneys. It interacts in the brain with neurotransmitters and turns on the desire to eat. Once we've eaten, ghrelin levels then drop back down and hunger subsides. After eating, another hormone named leptin, AKA the "satiety hormone", is released from the stomach in fat cells and interferes with these neurotransmitters and makes us feel full. If this hunger regulation system is in place in all of us, why do we have a second helping of pasta or look for a dessert after dinner? Some research points to the fact that high sugar and fat foods are so available (practically on every corner!) and that the continual intake of these foods can override the human body's natural regulatory system (ghrelin and leptin). So, it's not so easy to tell your brain to STOP eating, is it?

There are other factors that interact with each other and can influence how often and how much food we eat. These include:

* Genetics

* Environmental influences such as parental pressure to eat certain foods, restrictive feeding practices, restricting occasional foods like cookies, etc.

* Psychological influences such as sleep deprivation or excess stress. Studies show that chronic life stress is linked to weight gain, especially in males. Shift workers, who frequently experience sleep deprivation, are very vulnerable to eating larger meals.

* Fructose (HFCS) is metabolized by the body in a different way than glucose.

"Sugar" is not just "sugar"! When we eat glucose, the hunger hormone, ghrelin, is suppressed and leptin, the satiety hormone, is stimulated. On the other hand, fructose has no effect on ghrelin and can interfere with the brain's communication with leptin, thus resulting in overeating. Eventually, overeating fructose can cause insulin resistance, a condition in which cells fail to respond normally to insulin. This can lead to Type 2 diabetes and an inability to be able to even eat fruit!

So, what do we do?

Devise an action plan to curb overeating!

1. *Before you eat, try to understand whether you are truly hungry or you are eating in response to stress or pleasure.*
2. *Be mindful of your "food environment." Keep an eye on your food portions. Don't eat mindlessly. This usually happens when we watch T.V. or talk on the telephone while eating.*
3. *Try to stop eating when you're 80% full. This is a practice that has been around for a long time in Japan.*
4. *Eat slowly.*
5. *Eat with people who eat more mindfully.*
6. *Get enough sleep. This means having a regular bedtime schedule.*
7. *Eat breakfast or have a nutritious protein shake.*
8. *Lastly, eat large amounts of vegetables, moderate amounts of proteins and a good amount of healthy fats.*

None of this is easy, but definitely worth the effort!

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