

## CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR WEIGHT And EATING BEHAVIOURS?

### 3 STEPS TO GETTING THE HELP YOU NEED

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**Does this sound like you?** Some days I feel like eating every piece of food that's in front of me. I sneak to the store by myself and eat in my car. Sometimes I look frantically for some type of food without really knowing why, or what exactly I'm looking for. I justify my extra eating by telling myself that it's okay this once, that I deserve this. Snacking and munching on food makes me feel good and relieved in some way at the time. I forget about my stress. But after the eating is finished I still feel stressed, and sometimes worse about myself than before. So then I eat something else, and something else. It seems that I can't stop eating until I feel so full and guilty. I'm not sure I even know when I'm full anymore. And I just keep getting bigger and bigger. I hold it together on the outside. But inside I feel worried and ashamed. I don't even want to look at myself in the mirror.

#### STEP 1: LEARN

- **Eating can be categorized in two ways:** One driven by biological hunger (sometimes referred to as stomach hunger), and one driven by psychological hunger (sometimes referred to as mouth hunger). The first type generally is related to the body's need for fuel to sustain life and functioning. The second type is related to the human need for stress relief, comfort, safety, love, nurturing, and appreciation.
- **Stress and feeling stressed are related to the 2<sup>nd</sup> type.** Needless to say life is full of stressors—family and work responsibilities, deadlines, financial pressures, relationship challenges, and internal pressures (e.g., feelings of guilt, anxiety/worry). For some people even minor stressors can lead to over eating when they feel upset or overwhelmed.
- **Sometimes eating for comfort and stress relief is referred to as emotional eating or stress eating.** Eating for comfort can relieve psychological hunger by changing pleasant or unpleasant feelings and sensations. For instance, increasing, positive feelings/emotions (e.g., happiness, excitement/surprise), decreasing or temporarily eliminating negative feelings/emotions (e.g., worry, negative self thoughts, guilt), and increasing a sense of relief (e.g. calm, content).
- **Eating certain types of food can calm and sooth emotions and thoughts for many people.** Foods high in simple carbohydrates (e.g., highly processed: sweet desserts, white flour pasta with creamy sauces) and fat are often those used to comfort and ease distress; hence the term comfort foods. Though, sometimes people eat those foods just because they enjoy the taste. Cravings for comfort foods have also been linked with biological functions (brain and body) that are involved in stress (e.g., chemicals of mood regulation, other hormone fluctuations), as well as other psychological factors (e.g., negative self thoughts, shame, guilt).
- **The good feelings and positive experience that occur while eating can lead to not wanting to stop, and longer and longer periods of eating over time.** Some people describe that while eating they feel removed from their stress, numbed out, blissful, and out of touch with time and other events going on around them. The need to feel

and taste food in the mouth can be very powerful, and make it difficult to stop eating even when excessively full.

- **For some people emotional eating becomes a problem, as they find themselves repeating over and over the same pattern:** Stress. Need for comfort and relief. Eat. Feel better/good. Positive feeling subsides. Feel guilt. Stress, intense emotions, and negative thoughts result. Need for soothing, comfort and relief. Eat, and feel temporary relief. More, guilt, and weight gain (stress). The cycle repeats.
- **There are many reasons why people develop this type of relationship with food, and find themselves feeling trapped in what seems like an unsolvable cycle.** For some, emotional eating is not a major problem, as they do it only occasionally, and to a lesser extent. For others, emotional eating becomes compulsive eating and is potentially more serious. It may become a chronic problem that can develop in to binge eating disorder.

## **STEP 2: CHECK IT OUT**

- **If you are in doubt as to whether you have a more serious problem, the following brief check list of common behaviours associated with compulsive eating may help you decide if you should seek additional help and support.** It is not intended to be a diagnostic tool, or to replace the advice of a medical or mental health professional.
- **Do You:** Feel lack of control over food while you are eating? Eat very quickly? Eat until you feel very uncomfortably full? Eat large amounts of food when you are not physically hungry? Eat alone because you are embarrassed about what or how much you are eating? Feel very guilty, depressed, or disgusted with yourself after overeating? Plan secret over-indulgences in advance? Feel excited when thinking about time alone with food? Hide the evidence of your overeating, and keep secret your eating? Get strong cravings for specific foods? Feel better, even temporarily during or immediately after eating? Feel annoyed, hurt and trapped when others suggest that you use will power, or confront you about your eating? Eat to escape distress, worry, and other negative experiences?
- **If you answered yes to three or more of the above questions and your binge eating episodes have occurred, on average, at least two days a week for the past six months, you are likely eating compulsively.**

## **STEP 3: ACT NOW to SORT OUT WHAT YOU REALLY, REALLY WANT, FIND OUT MORE ABOUT YOUR PROBLEM, and GET THE HELP YOU NEED TO MAKE THE CHANGES YOU NEED TO MAKE.**

- **If you engage in the behaviours noted above and purge, fast or use excessive exercise to control your weight, please seek medical support from your doctor, and inform him/her of your problem.** Sometimes weight problems are related to medical problems.
- **Seek counselling support from a registered clinical counsellor trained in eating behaviour problems to explore the issue and help you resolve the problem.** I have specialized training and several years of experience counselling people with weight problems.

I work with individuals to understand and resolve their problematic relationship with food, so they can live happier healthier lives.

- **Counselling/treatment services are confidential. My office is discreetly located in a professional location in Comox, BC.**

**Please feel welcome to call me at 250-702-7762 to discuss appointment options. I look forward to hearing from you.**

**Take care.  
Karen**

References:

- Bays, J. C. (2009). *Mindful eating: A guide to rediscovering a healthy and joyful relationship with food*. Boston, MA: Shambala Publications Inc.
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- Masheb, R. M., & Grilo, C. M. (2006). Emotional overeating and its associations with eating disorder psychopathology among overweight patients with binge eating disorder. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 39, 141-146.