4 Strategies to Help Conquer Your Food Addiction

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How to Overcome Food Addiction

People who have a food addiction might experience extreme cravings for specific foods, overeat and build up tolerance and have difficulties quitting even if health risks arise. When you do stop, you might also go through symptoms of withdrawal — irritability, mood swings or lack of energy. In this article, we will talk about how to overcome food addiction, and we break it down into four strategies.

If all of that sounds surprisingly similar to other forms of substance dependence and addiction, you are right.

While food addiction is commonly associated with obesity, it affects more people than you might realize. In one of the very first attempts to see how prevalent food addiction is, research published in the Frontiers in Psychiatry journal found that as much as 10% of underweight and normal weight people are food addicts.

Liberate yourself and return to a place of balanced, healthy eating with a toolbox of strategies and methods that can free you from the grips of food addiction.

What Exactly is Food Addiction?

Back in 1956, psychologists referred to it as overeating hyperpalatable foods. Stripped of the scientific jargon, it basically means those foods that are extremely delicious and addictive. That typically means they are rich in calories and high in additives, salt or sugar.

According to the Yale Food Addiction Scale, the standard signs and symptoms of food addiction may include:

- Binge eating episodes.
- Wanting to quit but you are unable to.
- Spending a lot of your day thinking about food, getting food and recovering from your binge eating.
- Focusing on food to the point it tends to displace other activities, like going out with friends.
- Being unable to stop overeating, even as the health risks — feeling ill, adding on the pounds, experiencing high blood pressure or diabetes, etc. — increase.
- Building up a tolerance to your chosen food and needing more of it to feel satisfied.
- Going through withdrawal when you try to cut back or eliminate your binge eating.

4 Strategies on How to Beat Food Addiction

If any of the above sound uncomfortably familiar, today is the day to harness awareness and inner strength to tackle it once and for all.

1. Identify Your Triggers

Many people who have a food addiction first turn to food to help relieve stress, anxiety, depression and other negative emotions. Psychologists have found that addictive foods tend to be comforting, and the pleasure from a salty snack or a sugary treat can help you cope with life's difficulties and struggles.

Trigger-based food addiction may affect you if you ever catch yourself thinking, "I'm going to eat this ice cream because today was hard and I deserve it!"

Unfortunately, most people binge without checking in on their thoughts. To bring your awareness to the situation, try and keep a mindfulness journal.

Jot down when you had a craving and what was happening within you and around you. What emotions were you feeling? What thoughts were you thinking? What had just happened before your craving?

Most food addicts will quickly notice a pattern. Perhaps they get a snack craving while sitting in stressful traffic on the way home from work. Or maybe they binge eat at lunch every Monday.

These patterns can help you identify when you are about to be triggered and give you the time to redirect your food craving.

2. Redirect and Distract

If you have been struggling with food addiction for a while, you might think indulging in those cravings is your only recourse. But now that you are mindful of your triggers, you can practice more healthy coping mechanisms.

For example, if you eat when you are stressed or anxious, go for a walk with your dog or a jog around the park. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America reports that physical exercise can be just as effective against anxiety and depression as prescription medications. Other strategies to try include deep breathing, meditation and listening to calming music.

3. Set Boundaries With Your Temptations

What's your kryptonite? Your Achilles' heel? Perhaps it is cookies, or ice cream, or potato chips. Whatever it is, set boundaries between you and your temptations. The first step is by eliminating these temptations from your home, office, car or anywhere else you tend to store them for easy access.

Simply making it more difficult to indulge in your temptation can give your mind the few seconds or minutes it needs to take a breath, pause and engage in your healthy coping habit.

4. Get Professional and Social Support

When it comes to many forms of addiction, such as drug addiction, social support is key to improving your success rate. The same is true with food addictions. Be open, honest and frank with a close loved one or friend.

Share with them your triggers, what you struggle with and what you are trying to accomplish. Ask them to hold you accountable and to check in on you with encouragement. Having someone in your corner makes all the difference when you are trying to score a win against addiction.

When trying to self-treat any form of addiction, it is also important to consult a medical professional. The American Psychological Association can refer you to a local psychologist who can help you tackle the underlying causes of addiction that are specific to your unique life story.