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Starving the Temptation to Overeat

By Debbie DeAngelo
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How often do you overeat? If you're like most Americans, the answer is daily.

Many people don't realize they're overeating until they step on the scale. We equate eating too much with the "unbutton your pants" feeling at the holidays. However, feeling "full" after a meal indicates too much food and too many calories are being consumed.

The Japanese offer some great insight on this subject as they adhere to the concept of eating only until their stomach is 80 percent filled. Why? When people routinely overeat, they lose touch with the body cues that are designed to let us know we're approaching our stopping point. We then have no idea when our body is satisfied versus when it's stuffed – until after the fact.

Sound familiar? If so, then devote attention to these ideas and work on your trouble areas.

What's eating you? After a hectic day at work, are your two best friends Ben & Jerry?

Approximately 75 percent of overeating is driven by emotions. Emotional eating consists of consuming copious amounts of food, usually comfort or junk food, in response to your mood instead of hunger. Feelings that commonly trigger emotional eating include boredom, stress, sorrow, loneliness, anxiety, depression, and anger.

Instead of recognizing the problem and how you feel so you can resolve it, you often use food to cope with the emotional discomfort. When you eat to fill a void

and not an empty stomach you usually focus on specific comfort foods. Have you ever heard of anyone craving broccoli when under stress? Sugar and fat-laden foods trigger changes in the pleasure center of the brain that are calming and soothing.

We all eat for emotional reasons from time to time, but if this behavior becomes a consistent means of managing emotions, then we need to seek help. If unrecognized and unaddressed, no amount of nutrition and fitness information will help you lose weight or fuel your body properly. If you suspect that you're an emotional eater, contact a qualified counselor who also collaborates with a registered dietician. Expect to maintain a food diary so you can keep track of what you eat, when you eat, and most importantly, how you are feeling at the time. This helps to make the association between food and mood.

Eat mindfully. Instead of multi-tasking while eating, focus on enjoying your meal and the people seated around your table. By limiting distractions, you will actually limit food intake. Avoid the urge to take a working lunch or scroll mindlessly through your phone while eating.

Fuel yourself during the day. Whether you skip breakfast or skinny down at lunch, skimping on balanced meals early in the day leads to overeating in the evening. Studies show that meal skippers end up consuming more calories by the end of the day than people who eat meals regularly throughout the day. This is because your body requires a certain number of calories and nutrients to function well. Increasing your appetite is your body's way of getting the fuel it needs.

Pay attention to the quality of your meals too. A balance of protein, healthy fat, and fiber (produce and whole grains) keeps your blood sugar steady, so you don't feel hungry, and you don't have the urge to eat again a few hours later.

Delay second helpings. It takes your brain 20 minutes to receive the message from your stomach that you've had enough to eat. Since most Americans eat in under 20 minutes, it's possible to wolf down too much food before you realize that your body is satisfied. Prior to going back for seconds, wait at least 20 minutes and re-evaluate whether you're still physically hungry.

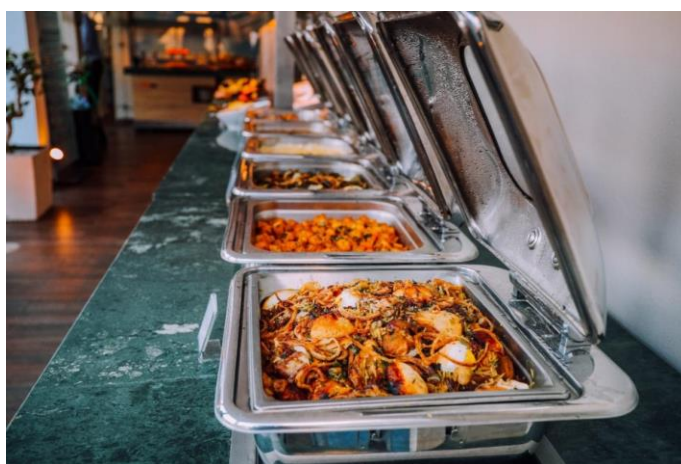
Kick temptation to the curb. Do the cookies in your cupboard call your name each night? Then don't buy them. When junk food is conveniently located in your kitchen, it's very tough to overcome the lure by sheer willpower alone. If it's not there, then you can't eat it. Being forced to drive to the store to buy these goodies when the craving strikes decreases the likelihood of eating them.

Recover from slip-ups immediately. "I really blew my diet at lunch. I'll get back to it tomorrow." Wrong. Do it at the next meal. Everyone splurges or overeats from time to time, but people who successfully lose weight and keep it off go right back to normal eating at the next meal. Waiting a day, or an entire

weekend, makes it tougher to get back on track – not to mention the extra calories you eat in the meantime.

Use smaller plates. Just a few decades ago, the average size dinner plate was nine inches in diameter. Today, it's a whopping 11 to 14 inches. Of note, our slimmer European counterparts haven't supersized their dinnerware. As a general rule, half of your plate should contain fruits and vegetables, one-quarter of it should hold a protein source, and the remaining one-quarter is for whole grains.

Eating only what your body needs, instead of what you want, begins with tuning into your internal signals. Let your innate intuition be your guide to nourishing your body.



When is it time to step away from the buffet?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debbie DeAngelo, RNC, BSN, is a holistic health coach, health correspondent for JET-TV and FOX 66 in Erie, Pennsylvania, and author of “Sudden Menopause.” She is also a ballroom dance instructor. Debbie can be reached at debbie@healthonheels.com.



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