

Help For Uncontrolled Eating

Currently, 64.5% of U.S. adults, age 20 years and older, are overweight and 30.5 % are obese. Severe obesity prevalence is now 4.7 %. Are you unable to control your eating? If so, you have lots of company. Being overweight is now America's #1 Problem and one in ten Americans suffer from Binge Eating Disorder (BED), where you have recurrent bouts of overeating.

BED goes hand and hand with chronic stress; anxiety, poor self-esteem, history of trauma; and history of addictions in your family. It can sometimes lead to deep depression. In severe cases psychotherapy and antidepressants help. However, all medications have side effects. More so than most people, uncontrollable eaters often base their self-worth on their physical appearance. They are relentlessly bombarded with images of perfection – air-brushed models and actors in magazines, movies and TV, they silently berate themselves for failing to measure up.

Four main causes of food cravings:

1. Your body is malnourished. If you ate more densely nutritious foods, your body wouldn't feel so hungry.
2. You're dehydrated and your body needs plain water. By the time you are experiencing thirst, you may already be dehydrated.
3. Emotional eating is used to reduce stress, anxiety and emotional suffering. Many people don't feel comfortable experiencing feelings because they were taught emotions are inappropriate, not important or wrong.
4. Do you crave sugar? Most people do, because it's everywhere. Sugar is found in many prepared foods; luncheon meats, bacon, canned meats; bouillon cubes, dry roasted nuts, alcoholic beverages of all kinds; peanut butter, dry cereals; ketchup, mayonnaise, breading on prepared foods etc. Numerous meat packers also feed sugar to animals prior to slaughter to improve flavor and color of meat.

And guess what, you always crave what you eat. So the more you eat sugar, the more your body will *crave* sugar. If you ate more vegetables, your body would *crave* more vegetables. However, because cravings are usually related to emotional stresses, it feels good to some people to medicate or (sedate) themselves with sugar. Here we find the double edge sword. There are dangerous side effects of sugar because sugar throws off your body's homeostasis when it sedates your mood. Sugar can cause a multitude of serious health problems from immune system problems to kidney damage and colon cancer.

Help Yourself:

- If you feel stress/anxiety is the culprit for you, incorporate stress reduction tools in your life
- Eat with awareness (slowly & mindfully)

- Write out a series of positive thoughts that rebuts a negative thought
- Use diaphragm breathing and energy medicine exercises to decrease stress/anxiety
- Feel your feelings instead of medicating them
- Write down 5 attributes unrelated to body weight or shape – review it when needed
- Treat yourself with compassion by eating healthy, nutritiously dense foods
- Your body feels like the enemy? – hold peace talks with it – find one thing you like about it
- Identify negative voices in your head and overlay them with positive statements
- If you get off track, realize there's no need to beat yourself up, just get back on track
- Trace back the cause of your feelings and triggers and respond appropriately to them

Chances are some of you may have heard the above suggestions before. However if you've found it difficult to "help yourself" perhaps you need more support and resources than you can create on your own. It has been my experience as a counselor and coach, that most people who suffer from uncontrolled eating have deeper emotional conflicts to be resolved. Many people are not aware of these conflicts on a conscious level. Yet there are clues to tip you off.

Clues:

Ask yourself if your urge to eat (when you're not physically hungry) came on all of a sudden. If so, this is a clue that there's an emotional source. It will help if you trace this sudden urge back to what happened prior to the urge, or earlier in the day, or yesterday. If you're in touch with your feelings (many uncontrollable eaters aren't) you may find you're eating to subdue or sedate your emotional feelings. Many people received messages when they were young to "stuff" emotions. If you've had anxiety and depression from past traumatic situations, you may be blocked from awareness. Uncontrolled eating may be one way of "stuffing" your feelings. However, the more feelings you "stuff" with food, the more these feelings intensify and grow inside your mind and body, and the more problems they cause. Most people don't understand that each time you push down an emotion it will come back up to us again and again, offering us another opportunity to feel, metabolized and integrate it. The reason for this feeling opportunity is because the body innately knows that "feeling" is the key to healing. Learning how to identify your triggers, urges, cravings and being with your feelings in a safe, supportive way, is the majority of the recovery process I help people through. While Weight Watchers and Over Eaters Anonymous might be helpful, they are not enough. You're not to blame.

I offer Transforming Eating Obsessions groups and individual sessions where I use a combination of hypnosis, guided imagery and inner work to help people achieve healthy weight management. People learn to use mind-body strategies to evoke their strengths and change unhealthy eating patterns. My next 8 week Transforming Eating Obsessions group begins October 4, 2005. For more information go to www.donnabird.com or call 518-584-0698.

Donna Bird, CSW is a Licensed Social Worker and life coach, specializing in Mind-Body counseling. She is nationally certified in Hypnotherapy, Wellness Coaching, Hypnobirthing, Interactive Imagery, EMDR, Wave Work and TFT. Donna has produced several Guided Imagery/Hypnosis CDs on healing and weight loss. She has facilitated corporate and clinical groups since 1990. Donna has offices in Saratoga Springs and Albany, NY.