

The conundrum of food addiction and weight loss

Opinion

Would you agree food addiction and weight loss can be a complex and difficult problem to manage? Where can food addiction and weight loss meet to ensure desired success?

Recent experiments in animals and humans show that, for some people, pleasure centers of the brain can be activated by certain foods rich in sugar, fat and salt. These highly taste-agreeing foods trigger feel-good chemicals in the brain such as dopamine. Yes, it is true. For people with increased dopamine transmission in the brain, the need to eat again can also quickly return. It is a rebound effect. Signals of fullness and satisfaction are overridden and the hormonal releases of ghrelin and leptin are negated. These two hormones form the gut-brain connection that controls our urge to eat. The result is that people keep eating, even when they are not hungry.

Many people find that as they eat more and more, food satisfies them less and they eat more. This physiological adjustment and behavior impact is like that caused by narcotic medications (Vicodin, morphine, other opioid-like chemicals). It is true that people addicted to food will continue to eat despite negative consequences such as weight gain and even damaged relationships due to physical size or figure changes.

Not surprising is how food addiction plays into the emergence of compulsive eating and binge-eating disorder (B.E.D.) behavior and its impact on long-term health problems (sleep apnea, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes and arthritis). But why do people become addicted to food?

Although the exact causes of food addiction, compulsive eating and B.E.D. are unknown, certain theories suggest that adults may have differences in brain chemistry that interferes with the ability to regulate food intake and create or increase the desire of a particular food or increase the preference of a particular food. Scientific evidence exists that one potential risk factor for food addiction and B.E.D. is the genetic influence contained in human DNA. It is known that particularly stressful events that happen in daily life at work or at home are also associated with food addiction and B.E.D. Life-threatening accidents or natural disasters can also support food addiction, compulsive eating and B.E.D.

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People with food addictions, compulsive eating habits or B.E.D. will tend to eat extremely fast, eat beyond feeling full, eat large amounts of food when not hungry, eat alone to hide how much one is eating and experience behavior changes including feeling aggravated or terrible after a food eating binge.

For those interested in learning more about food addiction and how it intersects with weight gain, Yale University's Rudd Center for Food Science and Policy (now a part of the University of Connecticut's Institute for Collaboration on Health, Intervention and Policy-In CHIP) has developed a questionnaire to identify people with food addictions.

Overcoming food addiction, compulsive eating and B.E.D which leads to weight gain demands a lifestyle and attitude behavioral changes with nutritional support and body metabolism adjustment, any weight loss program must offer these elements to allow weight loss success.

Quality weight loss programs can provide the needed paints and brushes that allow a human canvas to effect the best appearing portrait.

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Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.