

WARREN COUNTY COMBINED HEALTH DISTRICT WEIGHT MANAGEMENT CLASS

APRIL 16, 2018

HOW HABITS & EMOTIONS AFFECT THE DECISIONS WE MAKE!

WE ALL KNOW THAT WE SHOULD WAIT TO EAT TILL WE'RE HUNGRY...IF I HAD TO GUESS, I'D SAY MANY OF US HARDLY EVER ACTUALLY GET TRULY HUNGRY – AT LEAST NOT ON A DAILY BASIS! EVEN IF YOU *WEREN'T* SUCCESSFUL FOR OUR “NO!” FOOD THE LAST COUPLE WEEKS, (JOIN THE CLUB!) IT PROBABLY AT THE VERY LEAST MADE YOU REALIZE HOW OFTEN YOU REACH FOR FOOD WITHOUT EVEN THINKING ABOUT IT. FOR SOME OF US, EATING MINDLESSLY IS OUR “DEFAULT” SETTING!

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF HUNGER? THE FIRST THING YOU SHOULD REALIZE IS THAT TRUE HUNGER COMES ON *GRADUALLY*. YOU KNOW HOW YOU'RE WORKING ON SOMETHING – WRITING A LETTER, CLEANING THE FLOOR, WHATEVER – AND YOU FEEL SORT OF A MILD DISCOMFORT IN YOUR STOMACH? YOU JUST IGNORE IT BECAUSE YOU'RE BUSY! A LITTLE TIME PASSES AND MAYBE YOUR STOMACH LETS OUT A GROWL OR A GURGLE, AND THEN YOU THINK, “OH YEAH! WHAT TIME IS IT?” MENTAL HUNGER, FOR LACK OF A BETTER TERM, COMES ON MORE SUDDENLY; USUALLY IN RESPONSE TO SOME KIND OF STRESSOR OR CUE. IT COULD SIMPLY BE TIME! FOR EXAMPLE, IT'S NOON, SO I MUST NEED TO EAT LUNCH. IT COULD BE VISUAL - A COLORFUL BILLBOARD OR COMMERCIAL WITH A PRETTY PICTURE OF FRIED CHICKEN! IT COULD BE A SMELL – THINK OF HOW BURGER KING SMELLS WHEN YOU'RE DRIVING BY ON MAIN STREET IN LEBANON!

A DIFFERENT TYPE OF FOOD CUE, AS YOU VERY LIKELY ALREADY KNOW, IS *EMOTIONAL*. WE EAT WHEN WE'RE HAPPY! WE EAT WHEN WE'RE SAD! WE EAT WHEN WE'RE LONELY! WE EAT WHEN WE'RE...WELL, YOU GET THE PICTURE. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HABIT (IN THIS CASE, OF COURSE, NOT A GOOD HABIT!) IS FORMED WHEN YOU COMBINE EMOTIONAL EATING WITH A POSITIVE MEMORY. THE *SENSORY PLEASURE* OR THE FEELING OF BEING REWARDED IS THE MAJOR DRIVING FORCE BEHIND FOOD CRAVINGS AND ADDICTIONS. OBVIOUSLY, IF YOU WEREN'T GETTING SOMETHING OUT OF IT, YOU WOULDN'T KEEP DOING IT! THIS DEFINITELY INCLUDES EMOTIONAL OVEREATING. YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT HIGHLY PLEASUREABLE FOODS ARE CONSUMED TO MAKE US FEEL BETTER AND NOT TO SATISFY PHYSIOLOGICAL HUNGER. (WHEN YOU'RE REALLY, HONESTLY HUNGRY FOR EXAMPLE, ICE CREAM OR ESTHER PRICE ISN'T THE FIRST THING ON YOUR MIND, CORRECT?) THE PATTERN OF EATING TO FEEL BETTER CAN BECOME SUCH A POWERFULLY ENGRAINED HABIT THAT IT HAPPENS *ALMOST AUTOMATICALLY*. (SOUND FAMILIAR TO ANYONE???) THOSE OF US WHO DEVELOP SUCH A HABIT ARE PROBABLY CATEGORIZED AS THE IMPULSIVE/COMPULSIVE TYPE OF EMOTIONAL OVEREATER.

THIS POSITIVE MEMORY/REINFORCEMENT IS THE MAJOR DRIVING FORCE BEHIND FOOD CRAVINGS AND ADDICTIONS. AFTER ALL, LIKE I SAID BEFORE, IF YOU GOT NOTHING OUT OF A BEHAVIOR YOU WOULDN'T REPEAT IT. WE'RE NOT ALWAYS CREATURES OF LOGIC, WE'RE CREATURES OF EMOTION...WHICH EXPLAINS EXACTLY WHY INFORMATION DOES NOT USUALLY CHANGE BEHAVIOR.

SOMETIMES IT DOES; ONCE IN AWHILE JUST BY BEING AWARE OF AN ACTION YOU WILL BE ABLE TO CONTROL IT. IN MOST CASES THOUGH, IT'S A LITTLE TRICKIER THAN THAT!

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF INAPPROPRIATE, MINDLESS EATING:

1. FEEL BAD/EAT A COOKIE/FEEL BETTER
2. DO SOMETHING GOOD AND FEEL GOOD/EAT A PIZZA/FEEL GREAT
3. NEED AN INCENTIVE TO ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING/DANGLE A DOUGHNUT AS A REWARD/FINISH THE PROJECT AND GET THAT REWARD
4. WANT TO CELEBRATE AN ACCOMPLISHMENT/INDULGE IN CAKE AND ICE CREAM/FEEL REWARDED AND SPECIAL
5. SEE A FOOD COMMERCIAL ON TV/REACH FOR A BAG OF CHIPS

SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER...

HUNGER IS NOT THE SAME THING AS FOOD CRAVINGS

REMEMBER I SAID THAT REAL HUNGER COMES ON S-L-O-W-L-Y? CRAVINGS ARE STRONG, HAVE A RAPID ONSET, AND CAN BE ALMOST OVERWHELMING IN THEIR INTENSITY. ONE OF THE SIMPLEST SUGGESTIONS I CAN THINK OF TO WIN THE BATTLE ON THIS POTENTIAL PITFALL IS *ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT!* IN OTHER WORDS, KEEP THE STUFF YOU SIMPLY CANNOT RESIST OUT OF YOUR HOUSE IN THE FIRST PLACE! IF YOU DON'T HAVE CUPCAKES, YOU CAN'T EAT THEM! MAYBE YOU DON'T EXACTLY CRAVE FRUIT, BUT IF IT'S WHAT YOU BROUGHT HOME FROM KROGER, THEN FRUIT IS WHAT YOU'LL GET! MAKE YOUR HOUSE HEALTHY. CHECK OUT YOUR PANTRY AND YOUR REFRIGERATOR. MAKE SURE YOU HAVE SOME GOOD GO-TO OPTIONS AVAILABLE. LUCKILY FOR ME (AND PROBABLY FOR MOST OF US IN THIS ROOM?) I CAN SAY ALMOST 100% THAT EVEN IF I CRAVED SOMETHING, IT COULDN'T GET ME TO LEAVE MY HOUSE AT NIGHT. ONCE I'M IN, I'M IN TO STAY!

VOLUME MAY TRUMP CALORIES TO FEEL "FULL"

DESPITE THE AVAILABLE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DIFFERENT HORMONES AND THE STOMACH-BRAIN COMMUNICATION, NO ONE FULLY UNDERSTANDS THE COMBINATION OF FACTORS THAT MAKE US FEEL "FULL." WE ALL KNOW THAT WE DON'T JUST EAT WITH OUR STOMACHS; WE ALSO EAT WITH OUR EYES. FOR EXAMPLE, IF SOMEONE TYPICALLY EATS A HALF-POUND HAMBURGER AND YOU GIVE THEM A QUARTER-POUNDER, THEY WILL EAT IT AND STILL FEEL HUNGRY. BUT IF YOU MAKE THE QUARTER-POUNDER LOOK THE SAME SIZE AS THE HALF-POUND BURGER BY ADDING LESS CALORICALLY-DENSE FOODS LIKE LETTUCE, TOMATO AND ONION SO THAT IT SIMPLY LOOKS LIKE MORE FOOD, THAT SAME HUNGRY FELLA WILL EAT IT AND SAY HE'S FULL! PORTION SIZES ARE SO CRUCIAL! WE'VE LEARNED THAT THE MORE WE'RE SERVED, THE MORE WE'LL EAT! TRY TO MAKE "JUST ENOUGH" WHEN YOU'RE FIXING YOUR MEALS. I KNOW IT TOOK ME AWHILE TO FIX LESS FOOD AFTER THE GIRLS MOVED AWAY. I ALSO HAD TO DEVELOP THE HABIT OF BUYING LESS IN THE FIRST PLACE. REMEMBER TO TRY THE SIMPLE, INEXPENSIVE TRICK OF DRINKING 16 OZ. OF WATER BEFORE YOU EAT YOUR MEALS! WE'VE ALSO VERY RECENTLY TALKED ABOUT THE "EATING BIG" CONCEPT...ADDING MORE FRUITS,

VEGETABLES, AND/OR WATER TO YOUR FOOD IN ORDER TO INCREASE THE VOLUME AND DECREASE THE CALORIC CONCENTRATION. (IN OTHER WORDS, “DILUTE” THE CALORIES.) LET’S TALK ABOUT SOME SIMPLE WAYS WE CAN ACHIEVE THIS!

THE CUE-CRAVINGS-EATING-REWARD HABIT

A POWERFUL SYSTEM DEVELOPS IN THE BRAIN TO A) BE RESPONSIVE TO THE CUES THAT SIGNAL THE AVAILABILITY OF HYPERPALATABLE FOODS, B) INDUCE POWERFUL CRAVINGS AND REWARDING EMOTIONS THAT MOTIVATE US TO OBTAIN THE DESIRABLE FOOD, C) RESULT IN EATING (AND MANY TIMES OVEREATING THE HYPERPALATABLE FOOD, AND D) EXPERIENCE THE HIGH LEVEL OF REWARD FROM THE SMELL, TASTE AND TEXTURE OF THE FOOD. THIS SYSTEM ACTIVATES OVER AND OVER UNTIL IT BECOMES A HIGHLY-ENCODED EMOTIONAL AND PROCEDURAL MEMORY THAT IS ACTIVATED AUTOMATICALLY AND BECOMES HABITUAL “MINDLESS” OVEREATING! IT THEN HAPPENS WITHOUT CONSCIOUS DECISION- MAKING. IT IS WHAT IS KNOWN AS *HABIT-DRIVEN BEHAVIOR*. WHEN THIS HAPPENS, IT CAN TURN INTO *CONDITIONED HYPEREATING*. THE AIM IS TO REPLACE THIS WITH *GOAL-DIRECTED BEHAVIOR* DIRECTED BY CONSCIOUS, WELL- THOUGHT OUT CHOICES.

TRY FIGURING OUT WHY FOOD MAKES YOU FEEL BETTER (BECAUSE ULTIMATELY IT DOESN’T!) AND COME UP WITH AN ALTERNATIVE TO EATING. MAYBE YOU FEEL FRUSTRATED BECAUSE THERE ARE TOO MANY THINGS GOING ON THAT ARE BEYOND YOUR CONTROL: YOU COULD TAKE A WALK ON A PATH OF YOUR CHOOSING. MAYBE YOUR FEELINGS ARE HURT BY A FRIEND’S THOUGHTLESS COMMENT: MAKE A PLAN TO TALK IT OUT, OR DECIDE YOU TOOK IT WRONG AND SHAKE IT OFF! (THAT’S WHAT TAYLOR SWIFT SAYS TO DO!) UNFORTUNATELY, I’M A PROCRASTINATOR, SO MY MINDLESS EATING IS MOST LIKELY DUE TO AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOR – PUTTING OFF A NECESSARY BUT NOT-SO-FUN CHORE. STORY OF MY LIFE! I ALMOST ALWAYS FIND THAT WHEN I MAKE MYSELF BUCKLE DOWN AND FINISH WHATEVER I’M PUTTING OFF, THE SNACK I’M THINKING OF ISN’T EVEN NECESSARY. COMPLETING THE WORK IS REWARDING IN ITSELF. IT’S DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE, OBVIOUSLY.

ONE LAST THING: HOW ABOUT TRYING TO CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESSES? YOU’LL SURELY GET BETTER RESULTS WITH ENCOURAGEMENT, RATHER THAN WITH HARSH CRITICISM. CHANGING EMOTIONAL EATING IS A PROCESS. BACKSLIDING WILL OCCUR! ACKNOWLEDGE IT AND LEARN TO DEAL WITH IT WHEN IT DOES. USE IT AS A CHANCE TO PLAN FOR DIFFERENT FUTURE SITUATIONS. ALSO, SUCCESSES ARE SWEETER WHEN YOU SHARE THEM! TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU DID DIFFERENTLY IN RESPONSE TO YOUR (SOON FORMER!) FOOD CUE.

OUR “NO!” FOOD FOR THIS WEEK: CHIPS!!!

SEE YOU MONDAY!