

WARREN COUNTY COMBINED HEALTH DISTRICT WEIGHT MANAGEMENT CLASS

FEBRUARY 25, 2019

CONTINUED FROM FEBRUARY 11...EMOTIONAL EATING!

HOW CAN WE HAVE A "RELATIONSHIP" WITH FOOD? AFTER ALL, FOOD CAN'T TALK TO US...BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, IT NEVER, EVER REJECTS US! SO...MAYBE THAT'S THE ANSWER: *FOOD CAN'T TALK!* A BAG OF CHIPS NEVER SAYS "NO." A BURGER NEVER HAS A HEADACHE! FOR SOME FOLKS, IT'S THE ONLY "CONSTANT" IN THEIR LIVES. IT'S THE ONE THING THEY CAN COUNT ON, DAY AFTER DAY. THE NUMBER ONE NEED IN ALL OF US IS ACCEPTANCE – SOMETHING THE PEOPLE IN ADVERTISING (OBVIOUSLY!) UNDERSTAND COMPLETELY! IN A WAY, WE'RE PROGRAMMED TO EAT EMOTIONALLY. PICK ANY MEDIA FORM YOU CAN THINK OF, AND YOU'LL REALIZE WE'RE CONTINUALLY BOMBARDED BY IMAGES OF FUN, CELEBRATION AND BELONGING – ALL CONNECTED TO FOOD!

IS IT POSSIBLE TO BECOME ADDICTED TO FOOD? UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE ACTUAL PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS TO EATING – AND ESPECIALLY TO OVEREATING. WHEN WE EAT, BLOOD GOES TO OUR DIGESTIVE SYSTEM. OUR BODY TEMPERATURE THEN RISES, WHICH THEN RESULTS IN FEELINGS OF CALM AND RELAXATION. SOUNDS GOOD SO FAR, RIGHT? WE OF COURSE ENJOY THOSE FEELINGS, AND BEFORE LONG COMFORTING OURSELVES WITH FOOD BECOMES A HABIT. BY BECOMING MORE AWARE OF HOW WE'RE INAPPROPRIATELY USING FOOD, WE CAN BEGIN TO MAKE SOME CHANGES. UNTIL WE ARE ABLE TO REPLACE EATING WITH SOME OTHER COPING SKILL, WEIGHT LOSS AND MAINTENANCE WILL BE QUITE DIFFICULT.

SIDEBAR: ONE OF THE FIRST ORDERS OF BUSINESS AFTER A BABY IS BORN IS TO GET IT ADDICTED TO FOOD! THE BABY LEARNS THAT HUNGER IS UNCOMFORTABLE – AND CRIES IN RESPONSE – UNTIL IT GETS FED! WE ACTUALLY WOULDN'T SURVIVE IF THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN. IT'S DEFINITELY SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT. IT'S TOO LATE FOR ANYONE IN THIS ROOM TONIGHT, BUT IF YOU HAVE CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN, OR EVEN GREAT GRANDCHILDREN IT'S DEFINITELY SOMETHING TO KEEP IN MIND. **DON'T USE FOOD FOR A REWARD!!!**

AS YOU KNOW, SETTING GOALS CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIORS. IT'S VERY IMPORTANT, THOUGH, THAT THE GOALS THEMSELVES ARE REALISTIC, AND THAT THE TIME LINES – THAT IS, THE AMOUNT OF TIME WE GIVE OURSELVES TO REACH OUR GOALS – ARE CHALLENGING, YET REASONABLE. THIS WILL BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GOAL AND A DREAM! (WHOOOPS! GOT OFF ON A TANGENT THERE...GOAL SETTING IS A WHOLE DIFFERENT LESSON!)

WE'VE ALL "SAVED ROOM FOR DESSERT," KNOWING THAT WE'RE ALREADY FULL! LIKewise, ANYONE WHO HAS TORN INTO A BAG OF CHIPS AT THE END OF A STRESSFUL DAY HAS EXPERIENCED EMOTIONAL EATING. "EMOTIONAL EATING" IS USING FOOD TO MAKE YOURSELF FEEL BETTER – EATING TO FILL EMOTIONAL NEEDS, RATHER THAN PHYSICAL NEEDS. LIKE MY UNCLE ERNIE ONCE TOLD ME, "YOU NEED TO EAT TO LIVE, NOT LIVE TO EAT!"

THE THING ABOUT IT IS, EMOTIONAL HUNGER CAN'T BE FILLED WITH FOOD! WHILE IT MAY FEEL GOOD IN THE MOMENT, THE FEELINGS THAT TRIGGERED THE EATING WILL STILL BE THERE! TO TOP IT OFF, YOU OFTEN FEEL WORSE THAN YOU DID BEFORE BECAUSE OF THE UNNECESSARY CALORIES YOU CONSUMED. ADD TO THE (PROBABLE) GUILT YOU FEEL FOR NOT STICKING TO YOUR PLAN, YOU CAN ALSO FEEL INCREASINGLY POWERLESS OVER BOTH FOOD *AND* YOUR FEELINGS. NOT GOOD!

IT DOESN'T ALWAYS HAVE TO BE A BAD THING. IF WE WERE TO USE FOOD *FROM TIME TO TIME* AS A PICK-ME-UP, A REWARD, OR TO CELEBRATE, THAT'D PROBABLY BE OKAY. BUT WHEN EATING IS YOUR PRIMARY EMOTIONAL COPING MECHANISM – WHEN YOUR FIRST IMPULSE IS TO OPEN THE REFRIGERATOR WHENEVER YOU'RE UPSET, ANGRY, LONELY, STRESSED, EXHAUSTED, OR BORED – YOU GET STUCK IN AN UNHEALTHY CYCLE WHERE THE REAL FEELING OR PROBLEM IS NEVER ADDRESSED.

SO...HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M AN EMOTIONAL EATER?

- **DO YOU EAT MORE WHEN YOU'RE FEELING STRESSED?**
- **DO YOU EAT WHEN YOU'RE NOT HUNGRY OR WHEN YOU'RE FULL?**
- **DO YOU EAT TO FEEL BETTER?**
- **DO YOU REWARD YOURSELF WITH FOOD?**
- **DO YOU REGULARLY EAT UNTIL YOU'VE STUFFED YOURSELF?**
- **DOES FOOD MAKE YOU FEEL SAFE? DO YOU FEEL LIKE FOOD IS A FRIEND?**
- **DO YOU FEEL POWERLESS OR OUT OF CONTROL AROUND FOOD?**

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL HUNGER

WE ALL NEED TO BREAK FREE FROM THE CYCLE OF EMOTIONAL EATING. FIRST YOU WILL NEED TO DETERMINE WHEN YOU'RE EATING FROM YOUR EMOTIONS. THIS CAN BE TRICKY!

EMOTIONAL HUNGER CAN BE QUITE POWERFUL. AS A RESULT, IT'S EASY TO MISTAKE IT FOR ACTUAL PHYSICAL HUNGER. HERE ARE SOME CLUES TO MAKE YOU MORE AWARE:

- **EMOTIONAL HUNGER COMES ON SUDDENLY.**
- **EMOTIONAL HUNGER CRAVES SPECIFIC COMFORT FOODS.**
- **EMOTIONAL HUNGER OFTEN LEADS TO MINDLESS EATING.**
- **EMOTIONAL HUNGER ISN'T SATISFIED ONCE YOU'RE FULL.**
- **EMOTIONAL HUNGER ISN'T LOCATED IN THE STOMACH!**
- **EMOTIONAL HUNGER OFTEN LEADS TO REGRET, GUILT, OR SHAME.**

STOP EMOTIONAL EATING TIP #1: IDENTIFY YOUR TRIGGERS!

WHAT SITUATIONS, PLACES, OR FEELINGS MAKE YOU REACH FOR THE COMFORT OF FOOD? KEEP IN MIND THAT WHILE MOST EMOTIONAL EATING IS LINKED TO UNPLEASANT FEELINGS, IT CAN ALSO BE TRIGGERED BY POSITIVE EMOTIONS, SUCH AS REWARDING YOURSELF FOR ACHIEVING A GOAL OR CELEBRATING A HOLIDAY OR HAPPY EVENT!

COMMON CAUSES OF EMOTIONAL EATING:

- **STRESS – EVER NOTICE HOW STRESS MAKES YOU HUNGRY? IT'S NOT JUST IN YOUR MIND! WHEN STRESS IS CHRONIC, IT LEADS TO HIGH LEVELS OF THE STRESS HORMONE, CORTISOL. CORTISOL TRIGGERS CRAVINGS FOR SALTY, SWEET, AND HIGH-FAT FOODS – FOODS THAT GIVE YOU A BURST OF ENERGY AND PLEASURE. THE MORE UNCONTROLLED STRESS IN YOUR LIFE, THE MORE LIKELY YOU ARE TO TURN TO FOOD FOR EMOTIONAL RELIEF.**
- **STUFFING EMOTIONS – EATING CAN ACTUALLY BE A WAY TO TEMPORARILY SILENCE OR "STUFF DOWN" UNCOMFORTABLE EMOTIONS, INCLUDING ANGER, FEAR, SADNESS, ANXIETY, LONELINESS, RESENTMENT, AND SHAME. WHILE YOU'RE NUMBING YOURSELF WITH FOOD, YOU CAN AVOID THE EMOTIONS YOU'D RATHER NOT FEEL.**

- **BOREDOM OR FEELINGS OF EMPTINESS – DO YOU EVER EAT SIMPLY TO GIVE YOURSELF SOMETHING TO DO, TO RELIEVE BOREDOM, OR AS A WAY TO FILL A VOID IN YOUR LIFE? YOU FEEL UNFULFILLED AND EMPTY, AND FOOD IS A WAY TO OCCUPY YOUR MOUTH AND YOUR TIME. IN THE MOMENT, IT FILLS YOU UP AND DISTRACTS YOU FROM UNDERLYING FEELINGS OF PURPOSELESSNESS AND DISSATISFACTION WITH YOUR LIFE.**
- **CHILDHOOD HABITS – THINK BACK TO YOUR CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF FOOD. DID YOUR PARENTS REWARD GOOD BEHAVIOR WITH ICE CREAM, TAKE YOU OUT FOR PIZZA WHEN YOU GOT A GOOD REPORT CARD, OR SERVE YOU SWEETS WHEN YOU WERE FEELING SAD? THESE EMOTIONALLY-BASED CHILDHOOD EATING HABITS OFTEN CARRY OVER INTO ADULTHOOD. OR PERHAPS SOME OF YOUR EATING IS DRIVEN BY NOSTALGIA - FOR CHERISHED MEMORIES OF GRILLING BURGERS IN THE BACKYARD WITH YOUR DAD, BAKING AND EATING COOKIES WITH YOUR MOM, OR GATHERING AROUND THE TABLE WITH YOUR EXTENDED FAMILY FOR A HOME-COOKED MEAL.**
- **SOCIAL INFLUENCES – GETTING TOGETHER WITH OTHER PEOPLE FOR A MEAL IS A GREAT WAY TO RELIEVE STRESS, BUT IT CAN ALSO LEAD TO OVEREATING. IT'S EASY TO OVERINDULGE SIMPLY BECAUSE THE FOOD IS THERE OR BECAUSE EVERYONE ELSE IS EATING. YOU MAY ALSO OVEREAT IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS OUT OF NERVOUSNESS. OR... PERHAPS YOUR FAMILY OR CIRCLE OF FRIENDS ENCOURAGES YOU TO OVEREAT, AND IT'S EASIER TO GO ALONG WITH THE GROUP???**

YOU PROBABLY RECOGNIZED YOURSELF IN AT LEAST A COUPLE OF THE PREVIOUS DESCRIPTIONS. EVEN SO, YOU'LL NEED TO GET EVEN MORE SPECIFIC. ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO IDENTIFY THE PATTERNS BEHIND YOUR EMOTIONAL EATING IS TO KEEP TRACK WITH A FOOD/MOOD RECORD.

LET'S TRY THIS! FOR THE NEXT WEEK, EVERY TIME YOU OVEREAT OR FEEL COMPELLED TO REACH FOR YOUR OWN PERSONAL VERSION OF COMFORT

FOOD, TAKE A MOMENT TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TRIGGERED THE URGE. IF YOU BACKTRACK, YOU'LL USUALLY FIND AN UPSETTING EVENT THAT KICKED OFF THE CYCLE. WRITE IT ALL DOWN IN YOUR FOOD RECORD: WHAT YOU ATE (OR WHAT YOU WANTED TO EAT!), WHAT HAPPENED TO UPSET YOU, HOW YOU FELT BEFORE YOU ATE, WHAT YOU FELT AS YOU WERE EATING, AND HOW YOU FELT AFTERWARD.

OVER TIME, YOU'LL SEE A PATTERN EMERGE. MAYBE YOU ALWAYS END UP GORGING YOURSELF AFTER SPENDING TIME WITH A CERTAIN FRIEND. PERHAPS YOU STRESS EAT WHENEVER YOU'RE ON A DEADLINE OR WHEN YOU ATTEND FAMILY FUNCTIONS! ONCE YOU IDENTIFY YOUR TRIGGERS, THE NEXT STEP IS IDENTIFYING HEALTHIER WAYS TO FEED YOUR FEELINGS.

SO! HOW DID YOU DO WITH "NO CANDY!" FOR THE LAST TWO WEEKS? I'M HAPPY TO SAY I HAVE TWO DARK CHOCOLATE CANDY BARS THAT MY HUSBAND GAVE ME FOR VALENTINE'S DAY! (THIS IS THE CARD HE GAVE ME!)



OUR "NO!" FOOD FOR NEXT WEEK: NO BAKED GOODS!!!