

February Weighing In 2014

Comfort Foods Cause Uncomfortable Clothes

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Ah "comfort foods"--- those irresistible tasty morsels that brain researchers have found actually blunt negative emotions like depression and loneliness. Far beyond the random daily nibbling there are these positive memories, celebratory attitudes, and nurturing of associations that we feel when we are eating that favorite muffin. Doesn't the aroma of it baking remind you of grandma's cooking one morning as a small child? Then there is the smell of fresh baked bread or cookies in the oven around Christmas. All have measurable effects on our emotions.

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You're driving home from work after a very long day in no mood to cook so you stop at the local drive-through to pick up dinner because you're so tired and hungry and everything smells so good. And there right in your car you consume a cheeseburger with french fries and a milkshake that you never intended to eat. These occasions happen hundreds of times throughout the year. The more we understand that, the better able we are to gain control of our lives and of our health.

Those meals make you feel happy for a short period of time, but then you start feeling bloated and uncomfortable. Isn't it odd that food should make us feel happy when the real purpose of eating is to sustain ourselves? From what we eat we derive proteins and macronutrients and carbohydrates that our bodies need for fuel and other essential functions. We also get vitamins and nutrients from foods that our bodies can't process but still require at times. Why certain foods make us feel happy when we eat them is what science is trying to work out.

What we do know is that some foods are made of compounds that have been shown to positively affect our mood ...one of those is fish. People who live along seashores seem to be happier possibly because they partake of more fish. The fatty acid called DHA is the most abundant fat found in the brain. Since it is an essential building block of brain structure and neurochemistry, it's easy to see why two major sources of DHA are fish and shell fish. A study done with the National Institutes of Health uncovered a link between DHA deficiency and the prevalence of depression throughout United States. The Franklin Institute did a study and found that it seems that people in countries that don't eat a lot of fish have 10 times more of a prevalence of depression than do the populations of Taiwan or Japan.

It is clear that foods have a powerful effect on our moods. It was seen that eating only nutrient-packed foods would positively affect biochemistry and neuro brain chemistry and should be the best way to achieve that happiness feeling. Yet we also know that the sugary doughnut gives us that short-lived but enjoyable sensation of happiness as well. Perhaps a healthy balance of nutritious foods and comforters is the best way to balance a person's moods after all---but only if the latter doesn't cause problems in the long run.

Two types of neurotransmitters are responsible for our moods: excitatory and inhibitory. Nor-epinephrine is an excitatory neurotransmitter which stimulates our bodies and minds. We will get worn out from being revved up for too long though, so this type of neurotransmitter can ultimately lead to unhappiness or that feeling of depression we experience, for example, following a sugar-rush. Ultimately the best moods are found where there is a balance between these two. Typically, serotonin, the neurotransmitter most linked to happiness and needed to regulate sleep and pain, is also the generator of counteracting excitatory neurotransmitters. Foods that aid in serotonin include spinach and turkey.

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We need to understand that the comfort we get from certain foods does not come just from eating the food itself. It also comes from re-creating those elements of fond memories and soothing associations. Does a certain meal make us feel taken care of because we cherish the memory of the parent making it for us or perhaps making it with us? Do we associate food with contentment or security because we used to eat it at grandma's house? There is also the ritual of dining; you go back to the place where you had good memories or the restaurant that you proposed to your wife or where all the guys from your fraternity got together and toasted you the day you graduated. They bring back a flood of happy memories. Could that be why we feel we need a sugary doughnut on the day that went bad at the office?

Comfort foods are available everywhere. More pizzas are sold during half-time of the Super Bowl than are sold in an entire month. But remember that there is a price to pay when over-indulging on comfort foods! They may have given you some temporary good feelings, but what happens when you wake up the next morning and your pants won't zip up or your dress or skirt won't button? In frustration you ask yourself, "Why did I eat all that?"

It is interesting that when Jesus spent 40 days in the desert, his first temptation by Satan was to turn the stones into bread if he truly was the son of God. That's right; it was the temptation of food!

We are all tempted by food; it's what we do with the temptation that makes the difference. Some of us are tempted by chocolate malt balls, doughnuts, pop tarts, ice cream, cheesecake, pretzels, or buttered bread. For me it was my mother's apple dumplings--- there were never any better in the world. So whenever I walk by a bakery and smell really good apple dumplings, a flood of memories of my mom come rushing back. The temptation to buy them is so strong because I associate the great smell with my mom! I've learned though that it isn't worth the unhappiness I would feel when my clothes wouldn't fit. It just isn't worth it to me.

As Super Bowl approaches and all your friends and family are crowded into your living room and someone's asking you to fill up the bowl of potato chips again, ask yourself this question, "Is this worth it to gain back the weight I've worked so hard to lose?"

Stay the course. Know what you have to do to reach your weight-loss goal. Don't look back. You can do this!

Happy Valentine's Day.

Chuck Shaffer M.D.

Recipe of the Month:

“Barbecued” Chicken

Makes Six 4 ounce servings

Ingredients:

4 large boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 2 1/2 pounds total weight)

1/4 cup reduced-sugar ketchup (check the label and get the lowest-sugar ketchup you can find if you don't want one with artificial sweetener)

1/4 C homemade red pepper sauce (found on pickle isle-marinated red peppers pureed into sauce)

1/4 cup Stevia

1/4 cup apple cider vinegar

1/4 cup mustard (plain yellow mustard, not anything fancy)

2 tsp. tobasco sauce

1 1/2 T Worcestershire sauce

1/2 tsp. Chile powder

Lettuce Wrap Ingredients:

2 large heads Iceberg lettuce (or other lettuce of your choice)

2-3 green onions, sliced

Instructions:

Trim visible fat and any membranes from chicken breasts, then cut each chicken breast in half lengthwise. Stir together the low-sugar ketchup, pepper sauce, sweetener of your choice, apple cider vinegar, mustard, chili powder, Tabasco sauce and Worcestershire sauce to make the barbecue sauce.

Spray the slow cooker with olive oil or nonstick spray and layer the chicken in a single layer as much as possible. Pour over the sauce, so all the chicken is covered. Cook on high for one hour; then turn to low and cook 2-3 hours more. (Or just cook a little longer on low if you're not going to be home to switch the slow cooker setting.)

When the chicken is done, remove it to a cutting board to cool enough to handle. Put the sauce in a large frying pan and simmer over medium heat until it's reduced by half, about 6-8 minutes. Use two forks to shred the chicken apart. When the sauce is reduced by half, put the chicken in the frying pan and stir to coat with sauce. You can heat the chicken in the pan for a few minutes if needed.

To make lettuce wraps, slice the green onions. Cut out the core of the lettuce with a sharp knife; then peel off two lettuce leaves together to make a "cup" to hold the barbecued chicken. Fill each lettuce "cup" with desired amount of the chicken mixture, top with sliced green onions, and devour!

This chicken freezes well. For best results, let it thaw overnight in the refrigerator; then heat in a pan on the stove, with a tiny bit of water added if it seems dry.



Why No Protein Powders?

Recently many of our clients have been asking if they can have protein powders. Protein powders are not recommended for our program for several reasons. The Weigh Station believes in eating only whole foods. We want you to learn to eat the right way and this requires using only fresh real foods.

Whey protein is not a whole food. To make the whey (which begins in liquid form), extremely high heat is used causing the protein to denature. Some believe that this process may increase its carcinogenic (cancer causing) load. In addition, since it isn't a whole food it is quickly digested and absorbed. This causes a spike in insulin levels. Insulin is a fat storage hormone, so when you're trying to lose weight, you don't want your insulin levels high. Many of these shakes also contain sucralose (Splenda) which we have found can stall weight loss if used in excess.

Protein powders also fall under the "supplement" category, which means they are not regulated by the FDA nor are they checked for purity or content. A Consumer Report investigation found alarming amounts of arsenic, lead, mercury and cadmium in several well known protein powders (1). Since these powders are not regulated, it is easy for companies to get away with both contaminants as well as false claims that can make the powder sound better for you than they truly are. This is very scary and will definitely not help in your journey to better health.

Finally, the brain does not identify liquids as calories like it does whole foods; therefore it does not give you the "I'm full" signal. This can set you up for more cravings later and could easily make it more difficult to follow the program for the rest of the day.

Remember to stick with the foods that God provided us with. He is the ultimate healer and knows what is best for our bodies!

Tricia Foley, MS, RD, CLT

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine-archive/2010/july/food/protein-drinks/whats-in-your-protein-drink/index.htm>