

# September Weighing In 2014

## Emotional Eating: Empty Heart, Aching Tummy

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I recently received an email from a woman who was a patient at The WEIGH STATION about four years ago. She related how well she had succeeded in the program. She finally got control of her addictions and was doing well. Then suddenly a social upheaval occurred in her life, and she started spending more time staring into the refrigerator and cruising through her cabinets.

She wrote that she got caught up in the pain of loneliness, a physical isolation taking place in her heart and mind. She wrote, "I filled my lonely nights with food, anything I could get my hands on, especially candies, cookies and ice cream. Food filled the hole in my soul and my heart, but it only tasted good temporarily." Loneliness can impair health by raising levels of stress hormones and increase our body's inflammatory response. The damage can be widespread and affects almost every organ of our body, especially our brain. In one study, people that were considered lonely or having the ability to feel alone had higher levels of inflammation inducing substances in the blood. Chronic inflammation is linked to heart disease, arthritis, type II diabetes and suicide attempts.

People who are lonely react more strongly to the negative events around them, and they perceive daily life as more stressful. This in turn can depress their immune system. Also, for these folks that are carbohydrate junkies, the excess carbs cause reflux, fogginess of thought and increasing bouts of depression.

According to one study, having multiple friends and family members that are close does not guarantee immunity from loneliness unless there is a strong emotional connection with these people. Deep, meaningful quality relationships with your family or friends trigger a healthy response.

A study on patients who are emotional eaters found that comfort food is good at its job. Comfort foods are often wrongly associated with only negative moods and indeed, people often consume them when they are down and depressed. But interesting enough comfort foods are also used to maintain good moods. When asked for a list of comfort foods, ice cream became number one. Next were chocolate and cookies for women, and pizza, steak and casseroles for men. This study, conducted by Dr. Brian Wansink of the University of Illinois, found that when we are happy, our food choices will be steak or pizza (32%.) And when we're sad, it will be ice cream and cookies (39% of the time) and when we're bored 36% of us go for potato chips or other crunch items.

As you can see, food does more than fill our stomach; it also satisfies our emotional feelings. But when we try to deal with these feelings with comfort food without a growling stomach in need of sustenance, we are crossing the line into the dangerous grounds of emotional eating.

Some of the telltale signs of emotional eating are as follows:

1. Emotional eating comes on suddenly, whereas physical hunger occurs very gradually.
2. Emotional hunger needs to be satisfied instantly with the food you crave, whereas physical hunger can be postponed.
3. Emotional eating can leave behind feelings of guilt; eating when you're physically hungry does not.
4. When you are eating to fill a void that is not related to an empty stomach, the craving for specific foods such as pizza, chocolate, and ice cream will only be satisfied by that particular food. When you eat because you are hungry, you're open to multiple options.

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Emotional eating is one of the questions we asked you about during your physical exam. It's a very important question because it gives us a lot of insights to where your triggered responses come from. The key to eliminating your emotional eating is to find comfort foods that are healthy to replace the craving for junk food. Comfort foods don't necessarily have to be unhealthy. Just ask Tricia our dietitian for some suggestions. Recognize emotional eating and learn the triggers of this behavior. Make a list of what causes you to eat when you're not hungry and carry it with you. According to Tufts University's website, you can put off the desire to emotionally eat by doing another enjoyable activity. A few examples are taking a walk, taking a nice bath, or calling a friend to discuss what's going on in your life. Do something productive to take your mind off the cravings. Nurse Judie suggests to all patients to read the incredibly insightful book "Made to Crave" by Lysa Terkeurst.

Lastly, remember that emotional eating out of loneliness, boredom, sadness or happiness can all be corrected. We are here to help you in any way we can. Please allow us to help!

*"Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I'm lonely and afflicted"* (Psalm 25:16.)

*"You satisfied me more than the richest of foods. I will praise you with songs of joy."* (Psalm 63:5.)

Be blessed,  
Chuck Shaffer M.D.

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## Recipe of the Month: **Cilantro Lime Cucumber Salad**

Recipe from: THE FOOD CHARLATAN

### **Ingredients:**

- 1 jalapeno, seeded and finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- black pepper to taste
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cucumbers, very finely sliced (see photos)
- 4 tablespoons minced cilantro, to taste



### **Instructions:**

1. Dice the jalapeno and garlic and add to a medium-sized bowl.
2. Add 3 tablespoons of fresh lime juice, crushed red pepper, salt, and pepper. Use a whisk to incorporate the 3 tablespoons olive oil. Set aside.
3. Finely slice the cucumbers. Use a mandolin if you have it, but a very sharp knife will do the trick. (See photos below.) Add the cucumbers to the dressing and stir together. Finely mince the cilantro and add it to the bowl. Stir to combine. You can either let it sit in the fridge to marinate for a couple hours, or serve immediately.

# Attack of the Aspartame



When you join the Weigh Station you're asked to change many things from a dietary perspective. One of those things is stopping the use of artificial sweeteners, especially Aspartame. Aspartame can be found in diet sodas, sugar free gum and most other diet products. It is calorie free, so why is it so important to avoid it?

Unlike other weight loss programs, the Weigh Station program does not focus on calorie consumption, instead we look at hormones. This is why we draw your blood every six months. If your hormones are not working properly, you will not be able to lose weight (regardless of how few calories you eat!). Research indicates that aspartame actually increases your hunger and can impede your weight loss by influencing key metabolic hormones.

Let me explain, ninety percent of aspartame is broken down into phenylalanine and aspartic acid. These two amino acids are known to rapidly stimulate the release of insulin; forcing your body to remove the glucose (sugar) from your blood stream and store it as fat. Aspartame also acts on two major metabolic hormones inhibiting the production of one (called serotonin) and stimulating the release of another (called leptin). This in turn blocks your body's ability to feel full, which could lead to food cravings making it more difficult for you to stay on track.

Elevated insulin and leptin levels are two of the main culprits when it comes to obesity, diabetes, and a number of our current chronic diseases. Over time, if your body is exposed to too much leptin, it will become resistant to it, just as your body can become resistant to insulin, once that happens, your body can no longer "hear" the hormonal messages telling you to stop eating, burn fat, and maintain good sensitivity to sweet tastes in your taste buds.

The next thing you know you are hungry all the time! You crave sweets, and your body stores more fat. Leptin-resistance also causes an increase in visceral fat (the dangerous kind of fat located around the organs), sending you on a vicious cycle of hunger, fat storage and an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, metabolic syndrome and more.

In the end, the research tells us that artificial sweeteners do more harm than good. Contrary to what the marketing campaigns claim, low- or no-calorie artificial sweeteners are more likely to help you pack on the pounds than drop them for good!

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