

March Weighing In 2015

Dining with the Guest of Loneliness

I recently spent over an hour with a woman who'd been struggling with eating alone. She dined on potato chips, Doritos, Oreos, and multiple bags of other comfort junk food. She found excuses for this binge eating. As we talked I learned that she felt that 'situational factors' controlled her life. She felt lonely because her relationship with her husband did not produce the closeness that she thought it should. She had slowly separated herself from him and their home to avoid the empty pain she felt. The more she isolated herself, the lonelier she felt. And the more alone she felt, you guessed it, the more she overate!

Feelings of loneliness frequently cause such problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse, family breakdowns and other social ills. Loneliness can then lead to greater alienation from meaningful human contact. We see groups of gangs, religious cults, and other social deviants which can all be attributed to the people's need to belong to someone so that they don't feel lonely. They are looking for a sense of identity and need to feel they belong. Their failure to find acceptance in traditional settings causes them to search out alternative means. It may sound funny, but it is also this feeling of emotional isolation that causes people to binge on high carbohydrate, sugar-loaded foods. They find their comfort, their need for connection through the consumption of a bag of Doritos, potato chips or candy bars.

Each of us needs to connect with something larger than ourselves in order to fill a spiritual vacuum that exists within all of us. In the Bible, we find God's plan for developing the most important relationship in our lives, that is our relationship with Him. But if you're filling yourself up with other empty choices such as excess food or drugs or alcohol, then there's no room for a relationship to develop with Him.

Did you ever notice in the story of Adam and Eve, the Bible illustrates a really intense point? It is the importance of a personal relationship with God. But then God goes on. Much space in both the Old and New Testaments is allotted for Him to talk about the importance of other relationships such as those in marriage, friendships, and church fellowships. God said they were good. He stated, "It is not good for man to be alone."

Sadly we live in an era where technology has made it so much easier for us to get along without people. For example, we don't even have to go to the grocery store anymore as we can order our meals in on-line! We no longer bank in a building with other people or pay our city taxes at City Hall. Television at home and mobile phones in restaurants both cut us off from communicating with those we love. In the name of technological advances, we have cut ourselves off from daily interaction with others.

Fear keeps us isolated inside of our homes. With crime steadily rising, more and more people are afraid of leaving their houses to even venture forth to church. So many of our elderly population live alone and are terrified to by crime statistics to go out and enjoy the company of others.

Some people tend to be loners because of circumstances in their childhood development. If you grew up in a family where there was an unaffectionate parent or an overly critical parent, you may find that you shy away from intimacy with others and doesn't feel comfortable becoming close to other people. Others are easily intimidated because of their upbringing and feel a need to avoid others at all costs.

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People with low self-esteem often withdraw and from social situations so that they don't have to deal with the possibility of rejection. For these people, loneliness can become a lifestyle. They struggle with poor developmental skills, especially those interpersonal skills that allow us to communicate with one another.

So just maybe there is a reason that your weight is not coming off like you would like it to. Maybe those lonely food binges are causing your obesity. If so, then you need to be honest with yourself. Why are you eating as you do? Your reason just may be that you are very lonely.

So now we have to talk about steps to overcome loneliness. First of all, you must admit you have a problem with being lonely, and that you need to take steps necessary to escape your self-isolation. Consider the cause and then evaluate yourself honestly in light of all the reasons mentioned above. Do any of them apply to you?

Accept what you can't be changed. Many of the causes of our loneliness discussed can be overcome. Do you fear rejection because you feel inadequate around certain people? Do you stay at home watching television when you really could be going to a function that would not only help you but maybe someone else? Have you lost your beloved spouse? Has divorced severed a much cherished relationship? Has your BFF moved away from you? Are you an empty-nester missing the children? Are you young and single and for now, on your own? Regardless of the reasons for your loneliness, you have to take it upon yourself to meet the problem head on to make Life work for you and not against you.

A patient at The Weigh Station has set up a Facebook page---Weigh Station Winners---which serves as a reminder to people that we are here to connect you with others. I suspect that if you reach out and ask for help on one of the Facebook pages you have multiple people waiting to assist you. It's a start. It's a way of building each other up.

Lots of people are lonely, and they need others to help build them up. You cannot be lifted up if you do not allow people to lift you up.

So as I finished my conversation with this nice lady about her eating habits, I gave her a few suggestions that would help her overcome her loneliness. One suggestion was that she go read to the children at the school close to her home. Within three days she called to say that she started reading to children in her local school's story time. By giving of herself to the children, she was given teachers and students who were interested in her life. She then commented to me, "I realize that it doesn't matter how successful I have been in the world. What matters to me [now] is how successful I am in helping others."

So the next time you are feeling stressed, angry, downtrodden, or depressed because you are lonely, remember there's always someone that needs you if you make yourself available. You don't find relief from loneliness in bags of chips or cookies, in cans of soda, or in the 'one more bite.' You find it in giving of yourself to others.

Chuck Shaffer MD

It's not as simple as “Eat less, Exercise More”

At the Weigh Station we take a different approach to weight loss. We understand that losing weight isn't as simple as eat less, exercise more. It is a multi-factorial process which includes calories, nutrients, neurotransmitters, receptors, hormones, activity, and genetics (just to name a few).

Our staff has known for years that the combination of salt, sugar and fat create a perfect storm for food addiction. The starch in the food causes glucose (sugar) levels to rise, which results in a craving for more. Foods containing fat, salt and starch also stimulate the brain to release dopamine when we eat them; dopamine is the same ‘feel good’ brain chemical released if you do cocaine. Now there is even more evidence that simply cutting back on unhealthy foods may not be enough.

A new University of Michigan study confirmed that highly processed foods like chocolate, pizza and French fries are among the most addictive foods. This is one of few studies that looked specifically at which foods may be identified as “highly addictive”. Previous animal and clinical studies found that highly processed foods or foods with added fat or refined carbohydrates (like white flour and sugar), may be capable of triggering addictive-like eating behavior but did not go into specifics.

Researchers in this study able to identify these foods, they also found that individuals who had warning signs of food addiction coupled with a higher body mass index, reported greater problems with highly processed foods. This suggests that some may be particularly sensitive to the possible "rewarding" properties of these foods.

The study also found that unrefined carbohydrates did not seem to have the same addictive effect. Nicole Avena, assistant professor of pharmacology and systems therapeutics at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, and a co-author on the study, explained the significance of the findings stating that: "This is a first step towards identifying specific foods, and properties of foods, which can trigger this addictive response. This could help change the way we approach obesity treatment. It may not be a simple matter of 'cutting back' on certain foods, but rather, adopting methods used to curtail smoking, drinking and drug use."

These findings support The Weigh Station's belief that diet should never be a “one size fits all” approach. It also supports the fact that not all carbohydrates are created equal and reinforces the notion that some carbohydrates can be reincorporated to the maintenance phase of our program. When you reach your goal weight, we are always careful to only recommend unrefined, naturally occurring foods like quinoa, brown rice and winter squash. In addition, whole foods with lots of fiber were found to be unassociated with triggering one to “relapse” on unhealthy choices. Of course we do take each individual's past history into close consideration when one reaches maintenance and can make adjustments to their maintenance recommendations as warranted.

Journal Reference:

Erica M. Schulte, Nicole M. Avena, Ashley N. Gearhardt. **Which Foods May Be Addictive? The Roles of Processing, Fat Content, and Glycemic Load.** *PLOS ONE*, 2015; 10 (2): e0117959 DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0117959](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0117959)

Recipe of the Month

Baked Eggs in Canadian Bacon Cups

Makes 6 servings

Supplies:

Large silicone muffin cups, or a muffin pan with cups at least 3 1/2 inches to 4 inches across

Ingredients:

18 round slices Canadian bacon, or Turkey (thinly sliced)

6 eggs

salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 400F. Spray 6 muffins cups with large cups with olive oil or non-stick spray.

(If using muffin cups, put them on a baking sheet so it's easy to transfer in and out of the oven.)

Arrange 3 slices of meat in each muffin cup, overlapping so the entire cup is covered, press down to conform the meat to the muffin cup. Bake 10 minutes.

Remove tray or muffin pan from the oven and then crack an egg into each of the cups.

Season with a little salt and fresh ground black pepper to taste. Put back into oven and bake 14-16 minutes, or slightly more or less time depending on how done you prefer your eggs.

Serve hot!

Adapted from Kalyn's Kitchen

