

Q & A Mindline



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Q How do you overcome and control emotional eating?

Emotional eating is otherwise known as 'comfort eating,' a way of using food to make yourself feel better. We all have done it from time to time but are unaware of it.

Recall the character in the film '*Bridget Jones' Diary*,' - a youngish lonely girl who is not confident and depressed. This results in her bingeing on food and wine from time to time and feeling even more miserable afterward. She puts on weight and this lowers her self-esteem further.

Comfort eating can be triggered by a variety of situations, namely stress, boredom, frustration, anger, loneliness and depression. Sometimes, it also stems from a reason to just cheer oneself, or reward oneself when something is accomplished. One comes to rely on a quick boost of energy and feel-good factor from the food consumed. If done repeatedly, it can turn in to a learned behaviour or a coping style, resulting in close association between food and

emotions. Therefore, an overwhelming situation would lead to higher intake of calories (leading to weight gain and obesity). Afterwards, one feels guilty and miserable about episodes of uncontrolled eating.

Start with a general health check-up and recording of BMI (body mass index). This can act as the baseline record and subsequent point of reference. Also, it is recommended that an individual write a stress journal, recording the emotional reaction in a variety of situations. Reviewing it will help him/her identify trends and situation that press the comfort-eating button. As the self-awareness improves she/he can practice delay or distraction from the urges to eat and use alternative strategies to cope. Raise the threshold of stress with a regular exercise regime or 30-45 minutes brisk walk and perhaps *yoga* thrice a week.

If the above mentioned advice doesn't work, then the concerned individual should consult a mental health expert for evaluation of underlying psychological issues or psychiatric ailments that may be contributing to comfort eating which will surely and eventually lead to health consequences.

Q When someone is severely overweight and has body image issues, how would you get them to take the first step in joining a gym where they may feel overwhelmed and self-conscious?

Firstly, this person needs to have a complete health check to explore the medical conditions that may have contributed to the weight gain other than eating habits and also evaluate

complications that may have ensued due to 'severe obesity.' Calculating the BMI (body mass index) may be a good start. Offering a systematic feedback about health and the illness aspect of obesity may motivate one for change.

If the body image issues have been present before the individual had put on weight, then that will need a specialist (psychiatric) evaluation for an underlying eating disorder.

Such a disorder can be complicated but responds well to family or one to one talking therapy. Seeing a dietician for advice on healthy eating and cutting non-essential calories will help. Also, simply cutting on comfort eating can make a huge difference in reducing further weight gain. And perhaps he/she needs confidence building sessions before getting in to body toning, fitness and a weight reduction program.

Initially get him/her to start simple aerobic exercise like walking on a daily basis so that the morning routine is established. Then set realistic targets with qualitative emphasis on feeling more energized, happier and focused. Weight reduction should be gradual so offer regular positive feedback and tick off short-term targets. The key is guidance, encouragement and helping to overcome ambivalence for change.

Motivation is always within us, it just needs to be uncovered by removing barriers. Either we do that or have someone help us do it. I think initiation in to whatever we do, from an expert, trainer or passionate individual will give us an advantage from the beginning. The bottom line is that when we feel good, we do whatever is necessary, but when we don't, then we do everything to feel otherwise.

Ask your queries at bpositiveQA@apollolife.com