

## WEIGHT LOSS FROM THE INSIDE OUT – Part One

by Deb Elkin, LPC

I write this first of a two part series for those of you who have struggled with the ups and downs of weight loss and weight gain. This ongoing battle with food and weight deeply affects how we feel about ourselves in the world and how we bring ourselves into the world. So this month we will look at the reasons we tend to overeat. Next month will focus on how you can help yourself to make changes in your chronic battle with weight. ([WEIGHT LOSS – Part Two](#)).

Most of you probably know about the importance of good nutrition, good diet, good eating habits and a good exercise program. For some, these elements are what it takes to successfully lose weight and keep it off. For many others, however, this just doesn't seem to work. The weight either doesn't come off, or it doesn't stay off. And often, we don't know why.

In the ongoing attempt to lose weight, there is often one important element that doesn't get addressed. That is, what is going on internally, what is happening inside of us? What thoughts are driving us to overeat? What feelings, whether they are known to us or not, make us turn to food to soothe or comfort us, to make it all go away? How do the stresses and events of our lives, past and present, contribute to our daily struggle with food? It is important to begin to understand the answers to these questions. When a person is unable to understand and resolve these internal problems, weight loss will probably be temporary.

So why do people chronically overeat? There are many reasons, and I want to acknowledge that they are good ones. We often use food as a coping mechanism to help us handle the stresses in our lives. Sometimes we know what those are and sometimes we don't. If you are someone who struggles with food, consider the list below and see what resonates with you.

People overeat because:

- ◆ It is a way to comfort and nurture ourselves. In times of distress, food may be the only known way to soothe ourselves, to make us feel better.
- ◆ It is a way to detach from uncomfortable feelings and situations. It is also a way to numb emotional pain.
- ◆ If we can't tolerate conflict, if we don't want to feel our emotions, or if we just aren't familiar with the world and language of emotions, we may turn to food instead.
- ◆ It is a way to avoid intimacy. For some people, getting close to others just doesn't feel safe or comfortable. But we all need a place to be heard, validated, supported and nurtured. If that is missing from our lives, we often turn to food as our source of comfort.

- ◆ It is a way to keep the more vulnerable aspects of ourselves buried and safely out of “sight” so that no one can see our true selves and cause us any more harm than we have already suffered.
- ◆ Sometimes people need to keep a distance from their sexuality and their sexual feelings, and hiding their bodies beneath excess weight helps accomplish that.
- ◆ It is a way to express anger. This can be a deeply buried anger from the past, a current anger, anger at others or anger at self. When there is not a way to express anger directly and outwardly, it can go inward, towards self, with food.

What you need to know is that in all of these cases, food serves only as a bandaid. The issues, the feelings, the problems, don't go away when you eat. They are just temporarily appeased, temporarily soothed. And since they weren't dealt with, they will resurface, and we again try to use food to soothe it and make it go away again.

So over the next month, I invite you to simply start paying attention to your eating habits. Notice when you are overeating. Notice when you are eating mindlessly, without any real awareness that food is going in your mouth. See if you can start paying attention to what you are feeling when you do this. See if you can begin to make connections with the events in your life that may be associated with your overeating. Write them down, look for patterns. The first step to making change is to become aware.

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