

FOOD *AND* THOUGHT

June 2024



A lifestyle approach to improving mood and wellbeing

"LET THY FOOD BE THY MEDICINE AND THY MEDICINE BE THY FOOD."

HIPPOCRATES

Is It Hunger or Habit? Recognizing Unhealthy Eating Patterns.

Do you ever find yourself eating when you are not hungry? Reaching for a snack at the same time of day without giving it much thought? New research is showing that overeating may indeed be a bad habit, triggered by activity in the brain. This is because a complicated process of **neuronal reward** is occurring inside the brain when we are hungry. Neurons trigger the reward and motivation aspects of eating, and leave us feeling satisfied after a meal or snack. However, these eating activities and subsequent feelings of satisfaction can, over time, contribute to the formation of poor eating habits which occur even in the absence of hunger! This can result in chronic overeating, obesity and other health complications.

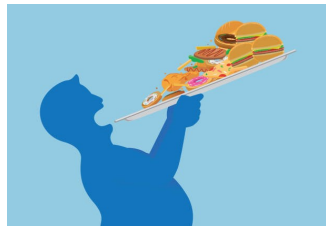


THE HUNGER SCALE

Continue reading this month's newsletter for more information on eating out of habit and what we can do to avoid or break these unhealthy patterns.

Habitual Eating:

According to the National Institutes on Health (NIH), studies are increasingly yielding evidence that show a significant part of daily eating behaviors consist of habits. Studies investigating the behavioral and psychosocial determinants of food choice show that habit is one of the most powerful predictors of eating behavior.



There are many reasons why eating habits (verses eating to satisfy hunger) may form. One reason is that eating can be an easy outlet for the extra energy that comes with feeling edgy or uncomfortable in some way. Not only does it give us something to do, it also distracts us from whatever's making us nervous. And our brain neurons reward us for it. Reaching for a convenient and tasty food item may relieve some of the initial discomfort we are feeling. However, this satisfaction does not last and often has longer-term negative effects on our health.

Common Reasons We may Overeat:

1. Stress
2. Fatigue
3. Nerves
4. Anxiety
5. Peer Pressure
6. Alcohol Use
7. Pictures of Food/Ads
8. Habit or Mindless Eating
9. Boredom



Mindful Eating 101

Mindfulness generally means bringing awareness to the present moment without judgment.

According to Dr. Judson Brewer, a psychiatrist, neuroscientist and director of research and innovation at Brown University's Mindfulness Center, being more aware of our eating behaviors can help us change them. He suggests the following steps:

1. Map out your eating patterns and habit loops (ask yourself, "why am I eating? Am I hungry or is there something else going on?")
2. Change the reward value of the behavior (are there any negatives to this food item I am eating? Is it sticky, salty, greasy?).
3. Find a more rewarding replacement behavior that makes the body feel content.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2024/02/06/mindful-eating-cravings-hunger/> : <https://www.webmd.com/obesity/ss/slideshow-why-eat-when-not-hungry> : <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21816186/>

The Food and Thought Program works to promote awareness and provide short term counselling around the important link between nutrition and emotional health. For more information or for a referral to the program, please contact the Food and Thought Program at 781-599-0110.

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