Understanding

A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP TO FOOD

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Introduction

There are many definitions of food. You can put some of them together to arrive at this, "Food is anything that people or animals eat or drink or that plants absorb in order to *maintain life and growth.*" Hopefully, the food is any nutritious substance that is taken into the body to sustain life, provide energy, promote growth".

When you do your own research, you'll find there are millions of websites about the role of food. Some of them are devoted to specific foods or specific issues. Most, if not all of them, agree that a variety of food has to be eaten in moderation to maintain a good quality of life.

The is the part where a disclaimer is appropriate. I'm not a nutritionist or dietitian or expert in any medical field. The information presented here is based on my own reading and research so I can offer it free on this website.

This e-book is for informational purposes only and is not intended as medical or dietary advice. Medical advice should always be obtained from a qualified medical professional for any health conditions or symptoms associated with them before making any changes to your diet or lifestyle. Additionally, every possible effort has been made in preparing and researching this material, but I make no warranties with respect to the accuracy or applicability of its contents to any personal situation or circumstances or any omissions.

Many people are lucky enough to go through life without ever having to give a second thought about what they eat or how they feed their bodies. Other people can become so completely consumed and overwhelmed by eating that their relationship with food becomes unhealthy. Our relationship to food can have a significant impact on our quality of life.

Dysfunctional eating can become a struggle for anyone, at any age and any gender. Sometimes dysfunctional eating starts with simple diet strategies if the plan morphs into something that no longer resembles a sound weight management plan.

The Role Of Food

The only reason we have to eat is for the human body to have sustenance and nutrition. And that's it. Food is meant to provide essential nutrients that work to make our bodily processes work and nurture our major body organs. Food provides us with energy and is essential for the proper physical development of children.

Somewhere along the way, people have seriously lost touch with this fact and we don't pay attention to what or how much food we put into our bodies.

Of course, supermarkets don't help with the endless rows of goodies and last minute snacks in the check out lanes. Unlimited choices of junk food have not helped us in any way.

Healthy eating still eludes many of us all over the world, as many countries struggle with obesity. Obesity and poor lifestyle choices are the leading cause of premature death from conditions like diabetes and heart disease that result from them.

Consequences Of Poor Nutrition

Obesity

Obesity is at epidemic levels in the US. According to the Centers For Disease Control:

- More than 36% of adults age 20 or older were obese in 2014

- 17% of children in the U.S. Were obese!

- The prevalence of obesity was higher in women (38.3%) than in men (34.3%).

- The prevalence of obesity was higher among middle-aged (40.2%) and older (37.0%) adults than younger (32.3%) adults.

Children as young as 5 years old are being diagnosed with obesity, which may be the biggest tragedy of all. According to the Centers For Disease Control:

- Obesity rates have more than doubled in children and has quadrupled in adolescents in the past 30 years.

- In 2012, more than 1/3 of children and adolescents in the United States were overweight or obese.

The causes of excess weight gain in young people are similar to those in adults, including factors such as   behavior and genetics.

Other Consequences

Of course, poor eating habits put you at risk for more than just obesity because when the body lacks proper nutrition, it can be subject to other serious medical conditions and health risks.

Hypertension

The National Institutes of Health advises that hypertension (high blood pressure) can result from poor nutrition. Hypertension is not often diagnosed until after it damages the body beyond repair. Too much salt, sugar, and fatty processed food can cause hypertension.

Stroke

The main risk factor for stroke is high blood pressure. Other risk factors include obesity and high cholesterol. Experts advise that foods high in salt, cholesterol and fat increase chances for stroke. Strokes occur when plaque builds up in a blood vessel and then breaks free when a clot travels to the brain and creates blockage. Stroke can result in paralysis and death.

High Cholesterol

Poor nutrition can lead to high cholesterol, which is the main cause of heart disease, the #1 killer of Americans. More than 500,000 people die each year in the US from heart disease, typically caused by a high fat diet. Some of the culprit foods are excesses of beef, sweets, ice cream, and processed high fat foods.

Gout

Gout is condition where uric acid buildup creates crystals in the joints. It is painful and leads to permanent joint damage. Poor nutrition is a contributing factor to gout. Foods high in uric acid include whole milk, cheese, ice cream and some seafood.

Cancer

Experts, like those at the National Institutes of Health advise that poor nutrition is a high risk factor for breast, colon and bladder cancers, just to name a few. A diet that is high in refined

sugar, hydrogenated oils, nitrates in hot dogs and bacon, and fatty foods like French fries put you at risk for cancer. Conversely, it is fruits and vegetables that are high in antioxidants that help protect cells in the body decrease risk for cancer. A diet rich in antioxidants is key to maintaining proper health and preventing a wide range of diseases.

No doubt, you have repeatedly heard that you should eat healthy and which foods are considered "healthy foods," this information may not be sinking in or it may not be enough. All of us have eating habits, and many of us have habits or eating patterns that are not concive to good health. Evaluating your eating habits closely is an important step in improving your diet and eating habits for the better.

The Struggle With Dysfunctional Eating

Dysfunctional eating starts to disrupt normal life when it interferes with the healthy intake of food. It's called dysfunctional because eating is no longer about consuming food to satisfy a nutritional need or but instead is used to satisfy other reasons, which are sometimes egregious or lead to negative emotional or physical results.

Healthy Weight Network on their website describes *dysfunctional eating* as that which is detached from the normal function of eating to satisfy hunger and nourish the body. Instead, the purpose of eating for the dysfunctional eater is to be thin, to reshape the body, or to relieve stress.

Dysfunctional eating can go beyond eating behind emotions, it can entail not being able to identify when you are full or satisfied or simply not knowing, or being in touch with how much food, the body needs.

It can also mean eating too much for the sake of pleasure, letting food control you and living to eat instead of eating to live.

Additionally, many people are hooked on carbohydrate rich foods, like junk food, chips and sugar that plague our society and many experts believe that carbohydrate intake is a one of the if not the main reason for the astronomical obesity rates in the United States, with 1/3 of adults obese.

In essence, dysfunctional eating patterns food has more power over you than you have over it, in one way or another.

You struggle to justify eating this or skipping that, but you never really get in touch with the simple concept of "food for sustenance."

Your Relationship With Food Shapes How You Eat

One way dysfunctional eating begins is when people start categorizing their food as either good or bad. Good foods become safe, easy to consume without guilt while bad foods become forbidden and are consumed in secret and with horrible feelings of guilt. Restricting food intake can begin to skew the view of safe and unsafe foods.

Often long periods of food deprivation can lead to an over-consumption of a particular food. This food is now deemed dangerous or harmful because it caused a binge. In reality, the lack of overall intake resulted in the binge of food, but the disordered eating pattern and the unhealthy food relationship will not allow that view to be seen.

Does all of that sound complicated? How about this?

You ate too much at lunch, so you decide to skip dinner. Then at dinner, you're starving and eat way more than you need because you gorge on a pile of pasta pesto. Now you know it must be the pasta pesto. Pesto is just too tempting. Can't eat that again, or you might overdo it. This is one way you can begin a dysfunctional relationship with food.

Those who perceive food as comfort will fall into the emotional eating trap, reaching for chips, ice cream, and pizza when they are stressed, angry, lonely, or bored, leading to guilt, shame and regret.

Those who see food as something pleasurable, will habitually over eat, which also leads to feelings of guilt, shame and regret.

Many people simply are not in touch with the key concepts of healthy eating, such as portion control and moderation as these strategies elude those who struggle with weight and proper nutrition.

The examples are plentiful, but it's important to focus on solutions so you can have a more healthy relationship with food.

How To Identify Unhealthy Eating Patterns

You may be continuing unhealthy eating patterns without even knowing it. You may need another wake-up call around ways you can eat healthier in order to avoid the complications that come from poor nutrition and poor eating habits:

Here 11 signs that indicate you may not have healthy eating habits:

1. **You Generally Finish Your Meal Before Anyone Else**

    If you are the first one done eating at the dinner table, you are probably eating mindlessly and are not savoring your meal in healthy ways. Chowing down your meal within a few minutes can lead to indigestion and seconds, which can lead to your becoming overweight.

Instead, you should eat more slowly, taking part in whatever conversation is going on around the table. Your hormonal signal to turn off eating takes about 20 minutes so if you finish much sooner than that, you will feel hungry even when you have taken in enough calories, which typically results in eating more food than you really need.

2. The Food You Eat Has Been Created In A Factory

Instead of cooking with fresh ingredients, you might be choosing to eat processed foods, which can be high in preservatives and are usually high in sodium (salt) and/or calories. Take the time to cook a meal with fresh ingredients, which are healthier foods. Find a nice selection of home-prepared meals you can put into your own personal cookbook. When you cook for yourself, you know exactly what has gone into making any particular meal and you have the piece of mind that comes with knowing what you put into your body.

3. You Shop In The Center Of The Grocery Store The Most

If you find yourself going up and down the center aisles of the market, where canned and processed foods are displayed and less time in the parts of the store that holds fresh produce, meat and dairy then you may be eating foods that are high in preservatives, salt and sugar and NOT real whole food.

Remember, food that does not need to be refrigerated is usually processed (except whole grains of course). Spending more time in the produce section of the grocery store

could lead to eating healthier fruits and vegetables instead of eating unhealthy, processed foods.

4. **You Eat Right Out Of The Box Or Carton**

If you find yourself eating potato chips right out of the bag or ice cream out of the carton, you are probably not eating the right portions of food and will have a tendency to eat more food than you had originally intended to eat. This is a sure fire way to obesity because you'll be tempted to eat the whole package.

Instead, portion out your foods onto a plate or bowl so that you stop when that portion is gone and save the rest for another meal.

5. **You Eat From The Drive Through Regularly**

Unless you are ordering a salad every time, which most of us don't, eating from a drive through regularly is not a path to good nutrition.

Most drive through restaurants offer fast food which is greasy, fat filled and loaded with empty calories.

Consider avoiding the drive through and load up on whole food that is food typically made up one ingredient and unprocessed such as fresh fish, chicken, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains

6. You Eat In Front Of The TV Or Distracted Eating

When you find yourself eating in front of the television, you're probably eating mindlessly and not paying attention to how much you're eating or to the signals your body gives you when you're full. This distracted eating can lead to serious overeating and obesity.

A better idea is to have your meals at a table, (preferably with someone else) and talk, listen to soothing music or to nothing at all. The idea is to avoid distractions that can cause you to over eat, focus on enjoying your meal and not on something else.

7. You Eat A Narrow Variety Of Food

Meat and potatoes are good. But, if you eat the same type and amount of food every day, you stand a good chance of missing some key nutrients that are needed in your diet.

Make sure your menu is filled with different foods so that you can be sure to get all the nutrients your body needs. Fill your plates with vegetables of different colors and fruit for dessert to get key nutrients from plant foods.

Look at the USDA Food Groups Chart and try to choose foods from each group every day, this is the easiest way to ensure you are eating a well-balanced diet.

8. You Eat To Appease Your Emotions

Emotional eating and overeating is always unhealthy and usually happens when people are bored, lonely, tired, upset, stressed, or angry.

It always occurs when one is not truly hungry, but is trying to use food to satisfy an emotional need and usually eating alone. The food of choice is almost always highly processed junk food.

Junk food stimulates pleasure centers in the brain because it is loaded with sugar, fat or factory created flavoring that holds little nutritional value.

Emotional overeating can be a serious problem that can lead to obesity, depression, guilt, and anxiety over the eating itself. This is one of the most serious unhealthy eating habits and plenty of help is available to address the problem.

9. You Eat Only One Or Two Big Meals Every Day

It is much healthier to eat 5 to 7 small meals each day than to eat two or worse yet one large one. When you eat small meals several times per day you keep the metabolism revved up and never let your blood sugars drop. When you starve yourself the whole day and then wolf down a big meal, you put yourself at risk for obesity and you won't maintain optimal energy levels you're your daily activities.

10. **You Eat More Calories Than Your Body Burns**

This may be the single greatest cause of being over weight.

The simple formula for weight management and weight loss is to eat less calories than you burn so to create a deficit.

This is true for men and women, and becomes even more detrimental as we get older and our metabolism naturally slows down.

Online calorie calculators can help determine how many calories you need to lose or maintain weight based on your age, weight, and activity level.

11. **You Eat In Secret**

If you hide food, or eat meals or snack in secret so that your spouse, friends or family don't see you, something is definitely wrong.

It could be that you have a negative association with your eating habits that you want to keep secret or you have some guilt or shame attached to eating. In this case, it is important to identify and deal with the issue, and the help of a therapist may be needed.

How To Make Changes In Your Relationship With Food

Many people who are trying to lose weight or make changes to their eating habits are fighting a one sided battle. A cheeseburger doesn't know you exist. Your feelings about the stuff you like to eat and feel guilty about eating can be complicated. Even if you don't have an eating disorder. Most people who diet just want to be thin and healthy.

If you know that starvation is bad, but think that only having a diet shake for breakfast or lunch is okay, then you may have an *unhealthy relationship with food*. It's a learned thing, brought about by society's unhealthy obsession with body shape and image that is ingrained (especially for women) in us from an early age.

If you want to be slim and healthy, then a healthy relationship with food is very essential.

The idea is simple: Eat To Live… Don't Live To Eat!

Eating healthy is not really hard if you're willing to follow the tips listed below. Healthy eating means paying attention to what you eat and choosing foods that are best for your body.

It's really all about the choices we make, and it's all in our hands. Take the time to evaluate your diet and eating habits, then make necessary changes before it 's too late. Prevention is always worth a thousand cures.

Essentially what you're doing is making a plan for a healthier diet and lifestyle.

Making a lot of changes at one time never works and decreases your chances of success. Instead of trying to make drastic shifts, make a list of all the foods you eat and those you need to cut

down on in your diet, and then keep reducing one each week. Making one small change where you might feel the biggest impact and working with until it becomes a habit.

✓ Be mindful of your eating habits and commit to change at least one each week.

✓ Ask for help and support from family and friends.

✓ Educate yourself on what are healthy foods, and the food groups.

✓ Make friends with healthy eaters, they can be your best support and role models for changing bad habits.

✓ Keep a list of all the changes you need to make and look it over every day to keep this information at the forefront of your mind.

✓ Use positive affirmations to help you overcome self-sabotaging thoughts and instill a healthier thought process toward food and eating. Thoughts and beliefs guide our behavior.

Never Give Up On Yourself

Keep with it and before you know it, new healthy choices and patterns will become habits, just as the old unhealthy ones once were.

If you're truly concerned about leading a healthy lifestyle, then these efforts are worthwhile to help you enjoy the life you want and deserve.

After you go through the trouble of doing all this self evaluation, the real question then becomes "How do I develop a healthy and lasting relationship with food?"

Everybody is different. Your body needs are different than anyone else, even family members. Their relationship with food has nothing to do with you because of the way their body operates and processes the food they eat. But, each of us needs to know what our relationship to food is if we want to make meaningful changes.

15 Ways To Have A Better Relationship With Food

1. Know What Hunger Is

Many people do not know what hunger feels like. They don't understand the physiological cues of hunger; they will either ignore them or never let them happen. Psychology Today recommends that you get acquainted with both hunger and fullness. The more you know about these two states, the more you will be able to recognize them. On that note, it's also important to mention that many of us simply are not in touch with how little food the body needs in one sitting to feel satisfied, typically it is 75 to 90% less than what many people consume in one meal.

2. Don't Punish Yourself

Many people will punish themselves for what they had to eat earlier in the day, or even yesterday. They do this by starving themselves, skipping meals, taking laxatives, or over exercising. It is important that you stop these punitive steps immediately if you want to stop damaging your view on food.

3. Know Why You're Eating

The practice of mindful eating is supported by almost every eating disorder website, dieting website, healthy food website, and nutrition website. So, what is it? Mindful eating is the practice of being present and actively participating in the meal you are eating. Take the time to smell the aromas, chew the food, take in the sights of the meals, and actually pay close and deliberate attention to each and every bite. Mindful eating

does not happen in the car during 5 o'clock rush hour. Stop and smell the roses, or in this case, your pot roast.

4. Don't Eat Out Of Boredom Or Fill Time

Many dysfunctional eating patterns emerge when we are younger. We start to eat to fill time. We were bored in the grocery store, so mommy or grandma hands us a lollipop to keep us busy. These habits follow us into adulthood. If you aren't physically hungry, stop eating. It may take practice, but you can do it!

5. Eat Only At The Dining Room Table

If you struggle with eating when you're not hungry then eating only at a formal dining space can really give you an advantage. This method doesn't restrict food content, quality, or type; just how you consume the food, you eat. Snacking to fill time can be a huge problem. So make it a rule only to eat in a formal dining setting.

6. Don't Let Food Rule Your Life

You have established a healthy eating routine, and now some friends want to go out to eat. To maintain a healthy relationship with food, you have to let these situations happen without freaking out. It's ok to eat out of your usual pattern, just choose the healthiest meal for you, and move on. Remember food getting in the way of your social life, is a sign of a negative relationship with food.

7. Stress And Food

Stress has a way of actually driving your eating patterns. If you're not aware of what stress does and learn to control it, it can destroy any attempt at healthy eating. It's a good idea to keep a journal to cue into your life's stress and see how it is driving your craving for foods. Do you notice that you only crave that triple cheeseburger when there

is a deadline coming up? Is the only time you eat a half a cheesecake when your boss has screamed at you, or you are bored or lonely?

What activities in your life are driving you to eat the way you do? If you can figure out these eating patterns, you are going to be able to start to shape different responses to your emotional stress. Instead of diving into a basket of fries, you can choose to fall into a pair of yoga pants to help alleviate the stress you're feeling. The point is there is always a better option than food.

8. Start A Food Diary

A food diary for someone who is looking to change their relationship with food is going to look very different from a food diary for someone who is just trying to track calories. Emotional eating and disordered eating have many elements that are not related to actual food consumption. The level of stress for the day should be considered when writing in a food diary. How you felt when you began eating and how you felt when you were done eating should also be documented. Recording the emotional elements of food will allow you to track how certain foods, triggering events, and even emotional states make you feel and eat.

9. Don't Keep Trigger Foods In Your Home

With binge eating episodes, often the problem starts with a particular pattern or food. WebMD says that to avoid binging, one thing that you can do is avoid keeping your personal trigger foods in the house. If your binges always start and end with cookies, chips, ice cream and other junk, then you shouldn't keep those foods in the house. Not having triggering foods in the house will help you avoid the binge in the first place. If there are foods you love, but end up binging on, go out for a treat once or twice a week. It's better to buy a scoop of ice cream once a month than to live with eating a half a gallon of ice cream in your house a couple of times a week. Find a way to work around the craving and the binge.

10. Learn What A Reasonable Portion Is

One problem that many people have is that they sit down with an entire bag of their favorite snack, and then they watch TV while eating until the bag is gone. This is a trap that always leads to over eating. Single serving packages are great because when the package is empty the portion is over and you have a cue to stop eating. If you do buy large bags of treats, then you should portion them out into smaller individual sizes or use a small bowl to hold your snack. This way you're more likely to stop eating when the portion is done.

11. Stop Using Your Weight As A Measure of Personal Worth

Often negative relationships with food grow from the fact that our self-worth stems from our weight. The desire to be thin can outweigh any other feeling we have. The problem with this is that most people don't view their body with an accurate eye. Some people, especially those who have an eating disorder, such as anorexia will see a distorted images of their body. Often people see themselves heavier than they actually are. These images may not accurately reflect what their body mass index shows, or what other people see.

Furthermore, there are cases where people simply place all that they are into how they look or how much they weigh; neglecting to appreciate their worth based on personality, their level of caring for other people or their general goodness and decency.

12. Look For A Quality Diet

When people start developing unhealthy relationships with food, they begin to do strange or sometimes radical things such as choosing a diet that includes eating cookies before a meal, substituting diet shakes instead of eating for most of the meals, or maybe only eating cabbage soup for 5 days.

Since you want to change how you view food, it's important to change what you're eating. Find more nutritious food that will increase your pleasure and satisfaction. This will allow you to indulge in the experience of eating and reconnect you with your body's natural response to food. Forcing yourself to eat foods you don't like on a diet or chronically under-eating is reinforcing a poor relationship with food and a recipe for failure.

13. Stop Making Rules For Eating

One of the key signs of a poor relationship with food is having too many dietary rules. These rules could include things like how much you allow yourself to eat, how many times a day you allow yourself to eat, restricting fats or even the number of times you chew your food.

Keep it simple. The more rules you have, the more likely you are to have an unhealthy relationship with food.

14. Don't Feel Guilty

Every eating expert talks about removing the guilt associated with eating. Don't let every little thing you eat or every mistake you make turn into a huge guilt trip. Chances are if you're eating, it's because you need to eat. Beating yourself up all day because you had a doughnut is not going to do anything to help you, your goals or your health. Instead, try to bless release the guilt and learn the art of moderation. This means eating a healthy nutritious diet and managing proper portions on a regular basis, while indulging occasionally.

15. Get Help If You Need It

If you have tried everything that you can think of to help yourself with your relationship with food and still find yourself struggling then it may be time to seek professional help. There are many organizations out there that are dedicated to helping people with disordered eating and unhealthy relationships with food. There is no shame in admitting you need help sorting out why you have problems with how you deal with food. It takes great strength to admit when you need help, but the rewards are well worth it.

Final Thoughts

Unhealthy relationships with food can start anywhere and at any age. With our culture's obsession with physical perfection, it is no wonder both men and women begin to obsess over how food will affect their appearance.

Food should be something that you eat to provide your body with fuel and to maintain energy levels. If you are frequently eating because you are sad, you need to cope with stress, or because it seems to be the only way to deal with your anxiety you may be developing an unhealthy relationship with food.

Eating disorders, obesity and being overweight can all indicate an unhealthy relationship with food that can include starvation, binging, skipping meals, yo-yo dieting, creating rules about what you can and cannot eat, lack of control, and perceiving food to have purposes other it is intended.

If you can begin to mend your relationship with food and eating, and gain a healthy perspective about why you eat, you can become healthier, lose weight, and stop the undue suffering associated with how you deal with food.

Stay well and take care!