



Making Comfort Foods part of a Healthy Diet

by Phyllis LeFevre, Certified NLP Life and Wellness Coach, phyllis@inspiremomentum.com

The term "comfort food" entered the American lexicon only a few decades ago, but most of us knew intuitively what it meant: pizza; cheeseburgers and fries; butter and gravy-drenched mashed potatoes; peanut butter and jelly; ice cream and the queen of divine sweetness, chocolate.

What all of these foods -- and other delicious items like macaroni and cheese, lasagna and fried chicken -- have in common is pretty obvious: lots and lots of sugar, fat, carbohydrates and salt.

Everyone should be able to enjoy comfort foods entirely guilt-free from time to time, but when comfort foods become central to your diet there are substantial issues related to weight loss, maintenance and overall nutritional health.

What is it about comfort food that causes us to crave them? Unfortunately the answer is exactly what makes them bad for us: sugar, fat, carbohydrates and salt.

Stress in all its' forms is often the trigger. Stress causes our bodies to produce less serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps to regulate sleep, reduce appetite and calm nerves. Eating foods high in carbohydrates, sugar and fat triggers the body to produce serotonin -- and produces a feeling of well-being.

Sugar and chocolate cravings also present problems for dieters and others attempting to lose weight and maintain good nutrition, and if you wrestle with sugar and chocolate cravings, know that you are not alone.



Almost everyone craves sugar, and almost everyone loves chocolate. Humans are naturally drawn to sugar from birth -- it is an important part of mother's milk. Sugar sends a message to your brain that everything is alright. Feelings of comfort, security and tranquility are manifested when sugar and chocolate hit your taste buds and enter your body.

In the modern American diet this primordial attraction to sugar is reinforced by the ubiquitous packaged foods that we consume because sugar is in almost everything. Just about any packaged food in your grocery store will include sugar, often in the form of High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) which is now usually referred to as called "corn sugar" to add some veneer of "naturalness" (corn) to the name.

Sugar is an addictive substance that alters your mind and mood. When you eat sugar you will crave more sugar, sending your body into an addiction cycle.

When sugar enters your blood it creates glucose, which produces energy. Different types of sugars are metabolized at different rates. The simple sugars found in processed foods cause glucose to be produced very quickly -- hence the "sugar rush" of rapid energy. But the body sees this high level of glucose as an emergency and it responds by dropping blood sugar levels.

Result? You want to eat more -- sugar.

How can comfort foods be incorporated into a healthy and nutritious diet? In a word: moderation.

When consumed occasionally all of these wonderful comfort foods can be a part of virtually any ones' diet without harm. But if large portions of these foods are eaten frequently they can cause many health problems, starting with obesity.



As NLP Life Coaches devoted to helping clients lose weight, maintain proper body weight and develop healthy eating habits we are acutely aware of the role that comfort foods play in our clients' diets, and we have developed strategies that allow our clients to enjoy comfort foods without undermining their health or their diets.

As with all parts of NLP coaching, we begin enabling change by enabling clients to change their minds, and we build upon a healthy -- empowered -- understanding that we choose foods, not the other way around.

Often the choice to consume excessive amounts of comfort foods is rooted in a misplaced attempt to fill some other problem or void in our lives.

- We teach clients how to avoid the urge to eat as a way to respond to anger or to overcome depression or loneliness, and to deal with emotions in a positive way.
- We teach clients to slow down while eating -- it takes many minutes for your brain to get the message that you've had enough to eat: give that first slice of pizza a chance to work its' magic!
- We teach clients to stop eating when full -- ideally to get up from the table feeling they could eat a little more. Ideally, stop at 80% full
- We teach clients how to find more healthful -- less caloric, less salty, less fatty -- alternatives to their favorite comfort foods. For example, if ice cream is your favorite comfort food, maybe a refreshing sherbet or fresh fruit might do the trick?



- We teach clients how to position comfort foods as a part of their diet -- a treat -- not as its' centerpiece. For example, if you know you're going out for a pizza dinner, maybe a nice light salad at lunch might be more appropriate than a cheeseburger?

And just to be clear: we mean a real salad -- primarily leafy greens -- not the modern American franchise restaurant version of a "salad" that has 150% of a ham and swiss sandwiches' worth of meat and cheese larded on top of a small amount of lettuce with a pint of blue cheese and bacon dressing topping that!

Phyllis LeFevre is a certified NLP Life Coach and Wellness Practitioner based near Raleigh / Durham, North Carolina, who develops individualized programs for permanent lifestyle change. Her company, Inspire Momentum NLP, works with clients in a one-on-one setting designing customized coaching programs that will ensure success. You can contact her at (801) 244 8333 or phyllis@inspiremomentum.com