



Emotions and Eating

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It is an old adage that we eat to survive, but in modern developed countries that is really only a small part of the picture.

At most times in history -- and, tragically, in many places today -- food was scarce, and most people rarely had the opportunity to over-eat. Quite the contrary: until relatively recently for most humans the pursuit of adequate amounts of food was their central occupation and the focus of their daily lives. Survival was what eating was all about.

The industrial revolution and subsequent urbanization in the west upended this paradigm.

For the first time in human history ever larger percentages of the population were entirely divorced from hunting, gathering and cultivation. Machines increasingly replaced human labor on farms and adequate -- and more than adequate -- quantities of food became available to ever-larger numbers of us.

On the surface this might seem like a good thing -- and it is certainly better than starving -- but "plenty" has brought its own problems.

Chronic obesity, bulimia and a host of other food and eating-related diseases and disorders are mostly products of modern times and modern lifestyles, and the 24/7/365 availability of food to most people living in prosperous countries.

Even gout -- which most of us associate with wealthy Shakespearean nobles -- has made a comeback, and now afflicts increasing numbers of middle-class people worldwide.

What are the roots of these issues with food?



Many people believe that modern life has a spiritual hole at its center, a disconnect from both the natural world -- farming, seasons, hunting, the tranquility of silence -- and, increasingly, from community: houses of worship, stable communities, families and relationships.

I believe that it is natural -- in this fractured environment -- for emotion to flow into people's consciousness to fill the gaps in unfulfilled lives, but one of the consequences is what has become called "emotional eating", a subject that is very high on the list of issues that come up in our NLP Life Coaching practice.

To be clear: emotional eating has nothing to do with "hunger" and emotional eating has nothing to do with nutrition -- unless we mean bad nutrition!

How do you know if you're an emotional eater?

- Do you eat when when you're full?
- Do you consider food to be a "reward"? (maybe an echo of childhood "rewards"?)
- Do you eat when you feel under stress?
- Does your hunger come on suddenly? (normal -- biological -- hunger doesn't)
- Are you focused on "comfort foods" when you get hungry?

If these sound familiar, you are probably an emotional eater.

On the surface it might feel like the problem is that you're powerless over food, but emotional eating actually flows from feelings of powerless over your emotional state -- when you feel unable to deal with your feelings you avoid experiencing them by eating.



How can we address emotional eating issues and take control of our lives?

NLP teaches that everything we do has a positive intention -- even if the consequences are negative -- and there is no more positive intention than the wish to avoid pain and feel happier. To experience healing and transformation of emotional eating habits we need to first accept the truth of our emotional lives.

To begin, we need to embrace and accept that our emotions are real and valid -- and we need to accept emotions even if they are sad or unpleasant.

The next step toward positive transformation is to examine the roots of the emotions that are driving us to eat unhealthily. Is it anxiety about work? Or maybe fear or apprehension about our relationship to our significant other or children? Or maybe -- the Perfect Cyclical Storm -- body image issues that are driving us to do exactly the wrong thing when we eat?

Whatever the root cause or causes are, we need to clarify what our positive intention is -- and how to leverage the power of that intention into healthier actions. That is the meaning of emotional transformation: to make the honest reality of our emotional lives into a force for positive change.

You can do it! -- and if you need some Life Coaching to turn the corner, we're here to help.

One simple practical tip: when you feel a food craving, take a mini time-out. Step out for a breath of fresh air, play with your pet. Even a twenty minute break can make a world of difference in whether you eat or not -- and what you eat if you do!

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