

Don't binge in misery

Lisa Antao finds about out the repercussions of emotional eating



AVOID THIS: Emotional Eating can result in obesity

How often have you polished off a whole bag of chips, just because you felt bored and had nothing better to do? Guzzled down loads of alcohol to celebrate as well as mourned when your favourite team lost in a sports championship? Or perhaps, comforted yourself eating icecream and chocolates, while wallowing in misery after a big fight with your boyfriend/spouse? If you do these often, then you are an emotional eater.

Definition

"Emotional Eating is a condition where food is solicited not for hunger but for various other reasons. These may include the fear of starvation, the need to distract oneself from thoughts which are not wanted (these may include thoughts due to anxiety, hatred, provoking ideas, etc.), the evocation of the parasympathetic nervous system which is the system of pleasure in our

body. Also, sometimes for reasons like revenge (where one eats to settle scores with a parent, who may want one to be thin), to kill boredom and monotony, to escape from the chores, duties of life (you have an excuse that you are eating so you can't do chores/duties) and to kill loneliness. So the factors driving eating behaviour is not food, not hunger but unresolved feelings and questionable ideologies," says clinical psychologist Varkha Chulani.

Dr Nupur Krishnan, clinical dietician says, "Emotional eating occurs when a person has the tendency to eat food when he/she is emotionally unstable. Emotional eating cycle over a period of time can destroy self-esteem and ruin health through tremendous weight gain. The problem is not one of willpower, but a complex interplay of psychological and emotional needs, physical changes, brain chemical-driven cravings, social conditioning, and

addiction to the emotional numbness brought on by bingeing."

Causes

Psychologically speaking, Chulani says that since people hate being uncomfortable, they do many things to avoid those feelings like shopping, taking massages, having sex, etc. Eating too, is included in escapism. So they escape dilemmas by eating, tackle problems with food and generally delve into buckets of ice cream, gorge on chocolates and cheese to feel good. They unfortunately haven't learnt coping strategies and believe too little in their ability to handle problems, thus the only solace they find when they are in trouble, is in food.

Effects

The effects of emotional eating can have undesired repercussions on one's health. Dr Nupur says that emotional overeating results in excess calories and obesity. Most obese people suffer social discrimination compared to a normal

weight person. This leads to physical and psychological stress in mind and compels you to indulge in emotional bingeing. Thus it makes a vicious cycle.

Most often emotional bingeing is associated with non-nutritional foods and the person is likely to suffer multiple chronic diseases and multiple nutritional deficiency related diseases. Excess sugars and concentrated starches cause havoc in hormones of metabolism and leads blood sugar to swing wildly up and down. These substances make up foods that are typical binge foods for most people, for eg. candy, cookies, pastries, ice cream and breads. Falling blood sugar levels stimulate your brain to release chemicals that drive the hunger centre, sending out a 'need to feed' signal, making you want to eat.

Dietician Poonam Singh, lists out the various physical effects of Emotional Eating like obesity, depression, insomnia, loss of memory, loss of mass muscle, osteoporosis, hair loss, nail loss, low blood pressure, low heart rate, headaches and even suicidal thoughts.

How to curb it?

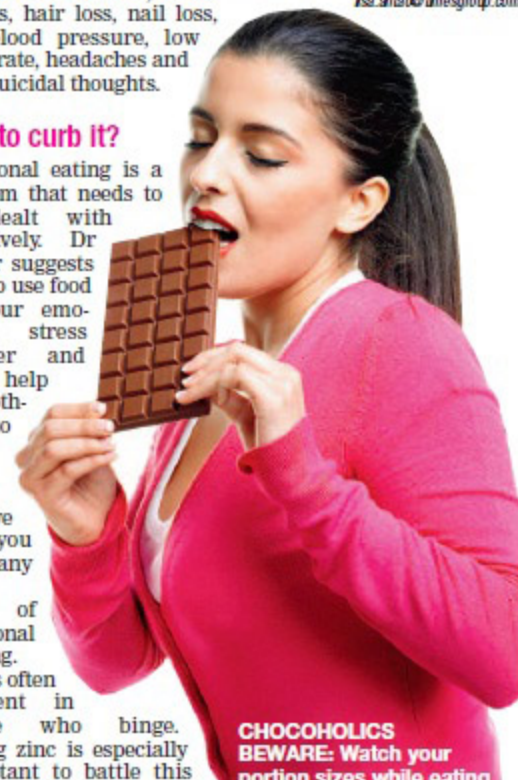
Emotional eating is a problem that needs to be dealt with effectively. Dr Nupur suggests, not to use food as your emotional stress reliever and seek help from others to

observe if you show any symptoms of emotional bingeing. Zinc is often deficient in people who binge. Taking zinc is especially important to battle this

disorder because it increases the appetite and aids the sense of taste. Also, never let yourself go for long periods without eating, and plan what you will eat (the right choices), when you can stop to eat, and where you intend to eat. Singh shares the following tips:

- Eat small, frequent meals and include plenty of whole grains, fruits and vegetables.
- If larger portions are served while dining out share it with family or friends even before you begin to eat.
- Watch portion sizes try to analyse your hunger before the start of your meal
- Start your day with breakfast followed by any kind of activity.
- Limit caffeine and carbonated beverages like colas/sodas to as much as possible
- Avoid living entirely on snack foods as they usually won't energise as much as a complete meal.
- Try various stress relief activities like listening to music, yoga, meditation, relaxing exercises, etc.

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CHOCOLICS BEWARE: Watch your portion sizes while eating