

Facing and Stopping Compulsive Eating

If you experience bouts of uncontrollable eating in response to emotional triggers, followed by feelings of guilt and shame—whether or not you are overweight—you may suffer a health care problem referred to as compulsive eating. Compulsive eating is not officially considered an “eating disorder,” but it can be just as deadly.

Compulsive Eating: Cause

Most compulsive eaters discovered in childhood that eating food soothed feelings of hurt, sadness, or other difficult emotions. In some cases, parents were not available, or were not capable or willing to meet emotional needs. This made it more likely that food would be used as a way to feel good. High carbohydrate foods and foods with high sugar content worked best. This continued into adulthood, and as a result, many compulsive overeaters become obese. They suffer from a lack of self-esteem. However, they also suffer from a lack of nutrients that contribute to depression, diabetes, gallbladder disease, heart disease, and more.

Are You a Compulsive Eater?

- After you eat, you frequently feel sick or stuffed.
- You eat to change your mood or feel better.
- You’ve wondered: “Am I addicted to food?”
- You prefer to eat alone so you feel less self-conscious, and so you can eat the amount you want, the way you want.
- You feel depressed, disgusted, or guilty after overeating.
- When you share food with others, you feel less guilty about eating it.
- You hide food, lock it up, and store it for later use.
- You can identify with: “Food is a comforting friend.”

The Cycle of Pain

Most compulsive overeaters are overweight and experience psychological pain others do not see. Some overeaters, with histories of abuse or assault may use their body size to protect themselves from others and society. Rejection serves a purpose: avoiding closeness and the demands of intimacy that are naturally a part of a healthy relationship. Eating helps soothe the pain of awareness. Many compulsive overeaters in recovery discuss the self-hate they once felt. This cycle of pain continues unless the compulsive overeater gets help. Compulsive eating is not treated just by dieting. It is treated by therapy and an effective ongoing recovery program that gives them their life back.

It’s Not about Weight

For compulsive overeaters, food is a hated friend that never fails to make them feel good. Food is eaten for no reason or any reason. Unfortunately, without treating the psychological driving forces behind the abuse of food, diet strategies fail. Compulsive eaters may seek close relationships with others who also struggle with intimacy,

the ability to manage feelings, and with those who don’t force the emotional demands of intimacy on them. Relationships with abusive persons, alcoholics, or other overeaters is not uncommon. But treatment can work.

Treatment Works

Treatment is a journey of insight, growth, recovery, and release. It is not an easy thing, but it is worth it because success rates are good with your determination. Treatment includes behavior modification to learn new ways of managing food, eating food, and behaving around food. Treatment also tackles emotional healing, self-discovery, and steps to improve one’s self-esteem. Treatment may include an evaluation for depression and consultation with a physician to help determine your medical needs. Knowing that you are on the path to recovery will energize you and make you excited about the journey ahead.

How the EAP Can Help

The EAP will not judge you. Instead, we will join your fight for sanity. The EAP can find you resources in the community, assess your eating pattern, and follow up with support.

