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The Hungry Heart - Compulsive Overeaters. Have a Heart Hungry for Love and Acceptance

You may know people, or it be the person staring back in the mirror, who overeats or binges, diets, then overeats or binge again in a never-ending cycle of weight loss and gain. They live on a roller coaster of thin and fat. Their closets have clothes of many different sizes, a sad testament to their lifestyle. They've had a problem with overeating and gaining weight since childhood.

A compulsive overeater knows they're overweight. Remarks from concerned parties like, "Let's exercise together so you can lose weight" or "why don't you just go on a diet" are emotionally devastating to them. Some will make jokes about themselves. (I feel like a beached whale.) Others accept they can't maintain a "normal" weight and continue overeating. (What's the point? Dieting doesn't work.) Some become reclusive - refusing to attend any social events. And then there are the workaholics with no personal life. (Can't go. I have to work.) Others live in denial and won't acknowledge the problem, (these clothes shrunk!) while some will try every new fad diet, supplement, exercise and support programs. Nothing works for them.

Compulsive overeaters sometimes hide behind their appearance as a blockade against society. They feel guilty for not being "good enough," shame for being overweight and may feel badly about themselves when it comes to food and body size. They use eating to cope which perpetuates the cycle. With low self-esteem and a constant hunger for love, the overeater will turn to episodes of bingeing and eating to forget the pain and their desire for affection.

Unfortunately they are only dealing with symptoms, not causes. They become so focused on getting the weight off - no matter what, even bingeing or starving - that they sacrifice good nutrition and eating habits which can lead to a multitude of health problems including: heart attack, high blood-pressure and cholesterol, kidney disease and/or failure, arthritis, bone deterioration and stroke.

They may or may not have a true conception of what normal eating habits are:

One such person was Lauren Grant who was born in Long Island, NY. She first became aware of her issues with food when she was a high school sophomore. She spent many nights watching television and overeating that led to weight gain. She tried many diets and did lose weight. But when she eventually "cheated," she felt guilty, would eat more for the fleeting comfort food offered, and gain even more. Eventually she would diet again. The time between weight gain and loss became shorter and shorter and a vicious cycle. Feeling trapped, she started therapy, began reading about overeating and joined various local support groups.

Unfortunately, her problem remained during college and she continued therapy. During finals, Lauren overate, initially thinking it was because of the stress. She realized she wasn't actually afraid of the tests - her overeating was due to her feelings about going home afterwards.

Even though she knew her behavior was caused by a stressful family situation with her father, she couldn't stop. Intellectually she understood, but emotionally she still needed the food to deal with her life. She had become quite informed and knowledgeable about overeating but continued to live in the cycle.

What changed? Twenty years ago, Lauren finally acknowledged the root of her problem and took stock of her life and dealt with her issues with food.

Ten years ago, she acknowledged how fortunate she was. By this time, he had a good marriage to a wonderful man and was pregnant with her first child. She remembers, "I felt ok for the first time in my life. I no longer blamed my childhood for my overeating. By this time my father had passed away and I couldn't blame him anymore. I was responsible for my happiness and overeating."

She began the Hungry Heart and chose that name because "overeaters don't really eat because food tastes so good, but because we're emotionally hungry," she clarifies.

People overeat for many reasons like stress, tiredness and loneliness. To them, food is comfort and/or a reward. But the most common threads of ALL issues with food is not feeling good about ourselves and/or not taking care of ourselves.

Lauren and her team of Certified Clinical Hypnotherapists and Nutritional Counselors, (who are all former overeaters) have stopped the cycle of starving, bingeing and excessive exercise. Lauren proclaims, "Our obsession with food drained energy, stole time and destroyed our quality of life. It robbed us of inner peace, self-esteem and happiness. We finally said NO MORE!"

One of her counselors, Linda Hill, says her greatest reward is when, "Clients can maintain their weight for the first time. They feel like 'real' people again."

"When I see the light bulb go off and they finally understand what it's all about - that gives me the greatest pleasure," Lauren remarks.

Their 8-step program teaches clients how to stop the diet/binge cycle and lose weight naturally - and permanently. Clients enjoy favorite foods without guilt or weight gain. The program is results-driven beginning with a free one-hour consultation. Clients are assessed to see if this is the right place for them.

If accepted, they receive tools, such as hypnotherapy, behavior modification and nutritional counseling, to make positive lifestyle changes. (During our interview, my stomach actually growls because I skipped breakfast. Lauren graciously shares her sandwich with me with a suggestion, "You should never let yourself get that hungry. Skipping meals is not necessary for weight loss.")

At the Hungry Heart, they determine and address the underlying cause, not the symptoms. "We're dealing with life and emotion," Lauren continues, "so they'll take care of themselves."

An important factor for everyone - it's not the amount you want to lose that's important. It's about the behavior and the insanity it causes.

Answer the questions below truthfully. If you can answer yes to several of them - you may have a problem with food. If you're out of control with food or making poor food choices continually and are.

1. Giving 110% to every project?
2. Self-critical and self-judgmental?
3. Dealing in negative self-talk (You're fat.)?
4. Unforgiving of yourself, but forgiving of others?
5. Pessimistic?
6. Driven and motivated?
7. Over-analytical?
8. Type A personality?

In fact, the same traits that make people successful in business and/or family cause many to become compulsive overeaters. And the results? They.

1. Feel isolated.
2. Suffer low self-esteem.
3. Feel others constantly judge them.
4. Eat until they're uncomfortable.
5. Consume large amounts of sweet foods.
6. Indulge in mechanical, mindless eating.
7. Have given up with losing weight.
8. Think everything is black or white.

"Our major goal is to help them find self-acceptance," Lauren says. Linda adds, "For every negative thought, it takes four positive thoughts to balance it." People must learn to love themselves unconditionally, no matter at what weight they are. And if you have a friend who's dieting, never say, "You look great now that you've lost weight." You might as well be saying, "When you're heavy, you look terrible."

So what do you say when you want to be supportive? Lauren suggests, "You look good (no weight mention)."

The group of professionals at the Hungry Heart have worked with a multitude of women - including those that are extremely obese to those that only have the self perception that they are obese. Regardless of the situation, they provide support, understanding and the tools to overcome the never-ending cycle of weight loss and gain.