

Food

Friend... or Foe?



A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions and those affected by them

Eating Disorders

Eating food is something we must do every day, just in order to live. Most people use food as a pleasant source of fuel, the substance God designed to help nourish our physical bodies and keep our systems in working order. Yet, for others the consumption of food becomes a temporary solution for emotional pain, similar to an alcoholic using alcohol. And like the alcoholic, as we turn to food as the solution to our pain it becomes our problem – we have crossed that invisible line to addiction.

Although not curable, compulsive overeating can be arrested. As overeaters we are always looking for the secret to the reason why we cannot control our eating. Each new self-help book or diet stirs hope anew within us. Our dream is that one day we will be able to maintain a “normal” weight, because we believe this would solve all of our problems! However, we find that our weight is only a symptom of our inner turmoil. ***Compulsive eating*** is a physical, emotional and spiritual illness. Eating may temporarily relieve anxiety or other emotional pain, and it seems much more acceptable to be a “foodaholic” than an “alcoholic”. Our behavior may not be quite as bizarre as that of a person addicted to alcohol or drugs, but our dependency is every bit as difficult to break – perhaps more so, because we *must* eat every day just in order to maintain life.

Compulsive eating can be even more cunning, baffling and powerful than alcohol or drug addiction. This pattern stops only when a person “hits bottom”, breaks through denial and reaches out for help!

Merry-Go-Round of Diets

How we try, with one torturous diet after another, to remedy our situation, once and for all! Sometimes we will fast all day long, only to “blow it” at dinner. The next day we are right back at it, always with great intentions, but seemingly no willpower. We may be envious of, or even enraged, by friends who seem to be able to consume quantities of rich food without consequence. Sometimes we attempt to justify ourselves by pointing to our overweight relatives, insisting it must be “in the genes” and we are just destined to be jumbo-sized. Our mirror keeps shouting the truth over and over again. After a while, we actually avoid looking into a mirror unless it becomes absolutely necessary!

Loss of Control

Most people eat to live, but there are those of us who literally live to eat! We grasp every opportunity to literally gorge ourselves with food – our “faithful friend.” The problem is we are inevitably drenched with guilt after stuffing ourselves. For those suffering from **Bulimia**, (which means “animal hunger”) we think we have discovered the solution to our raving appetite: we promptly vomit the contents of our stomach after eating, perhaps many times a day. This cycle of Bulimia becomes overpowering – we think we can eat anything we please without adding unwanted pounds by purging it from our system. At first we may feel “in control” of the situation, but eventually the compulsion gains control, setting off the cycle of “hunger – binge – purge – hunger – etc”. This pattern may continue and all the while we may seem to maintain a normal weight. However, the internal organs are being severely punished, along with the emotional wellbeing of the individual.

This disorder is becoming more prevalent in many female college students, as well as among a growing number of young people.

Mirrors can lie!

One doesn't necessarily have to be fat to suffer from compulsive eating. The disease of compulsive eating manifests itself in several different ways. There are those of us who struggle with **Anorexia Nervosa**. In this case, a person restricts his/her input of food to the point of emaciation, while the mind is deluded to believe otherwise. The results may be a weight reduction of 25% or more of normal body weight. We may use laxatives and excessive exercise to accomplish our obsessive goals. This disorder is more prominent in women and usually begins at a young age. To a person with anorexia nervosa, *any* eating feels like a loss of control. A woman may suffer the loss of menstrual periods, literally starving herself to death! This starvation can eventually affect the brain to the point of psychosis.

Shame Factor

Many people have been plagued since childhood with problems of overeating. For others, overeating problems develop later, perhaps after childbirth or during the physiological changes that take place during mid-life. As Christians we are only too aware of the fact that our bodies are supposed to be "temples of the Holy Spirit". Yet holidays and celebrations bring too many temptations to indulge ourselves, and we yield. Guilt shatters our self-esteem, and we berate ourselves for the inability to control our eating.

Some people are under the assumption that eating disorders basically affect only women. This is simply not true. People do react differently to overweight women than they do to men. By silent disdain of the woman's appearance – not daring to injure her sensitive feelings with a negative comment – or, in the case of a man who is overweight, verbal abuse via cruel jests, it is no wonder that "fat" people (especially men) need to appear to be "jolly". They feel they must protect their ego by being in the best humor possible, while inside, they secretly die.

Danger Signals

Some red flags to look for in regard to eating disorders are as follows:

1. Someone on a strict diet
2. Frequent overeating
3. Expression of guilt about eating
4. Secretive about eating
5. Planning binges
6. Disappearance after meals
7. Feeling of being “bloated” after meals

Ask Yourself

The following questions were developed to aid people in determining whether or not there may be a problem with compulsive overeating.

1. Do you eat when you're not hungry?
2. Do you go on eating binges for no apparent reason?
3. Do you have feelings of guilt and remorse after overeating?
4. Do you give too much time and thought to food?
5. Do you look forward with pleasure and anticipation to the moments when you can eat alone?
6. Do you plan these secret binges ahead of time?
7. Do you eat sensibly in front of others and then make up for it alone?
8. Is your weight affecting the way you live your life?
9. Have you tried to diet for a week (or longer), only to fall short of your goal?
10. Do you resent the advice of others who tell you to “use a little willpower” to stop overeating?
11. Despite evidence to the contrary, have you continued to assert that you can diet “on your own” whenever you wish?
12. Do you crave to eat at a definite time, day or night, other than mealtime?
13. Do you eat to escape from worries or trouble?
14. Has your physician ever treated you for being overweight?
15. Does your food obsession make you or others unhappy?

If you have answered “yes” to three or more of these questions it is *probable* that you are struggling with a compulsive eating problem.

There is Help

12-Step programs utilize the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. The fellowship of others, who have struggled, and are winning, through the use of the practical, proven tools of the 12 steps, is vital to recovery. It takes courage to throw pride to the wind and candidly share our feelings with others. Yet, if others are willing to share their experience, strength, hope and victory, how wise we would be to avail ourselves of this additional help that God has provided!

Overcomers Outreach groups use the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (with permission) along with the Holy Bible to discover the wisdom of God and apply His teachings to our daily lives. Honest individual sharing of trials and victories, along with mutual prayer, provides a confidential and secure environment where we can experience the faith, hope and love of Jesus Christ, whom we claim as our “higher power”. We meet weekly in loving support of one another, not as a substitute for, but rather as a supplement to other 12-Step groups. We are non-profit and non-professional, and we welcome anyone who is not opposed to our general method of recovery, whatever his or her presenting problem.

For more information or to find a meeting, contact us:

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**BETWEEN
12 STEP RECOVERY GROUPS
AND CHURCHES
OF ALL DENOMINATIONS**