

Healthy Relationships with Food



e-Book

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bariatric
FOOD COACH



What is a healthy relationship with food?

Is it possible to foster a healthy relationship with food? Does that feel like a complicated question?

When you think of someone who does seem to have a healthy relationship with food, does anyone come to mind?

Is it hard to think of someone? Do you find yourself discrediting people who have not struggled with their weight? Do you feel like you know more people who have a love-hate relationship with food than a well balanced relationship?

I recently concluded a 28 day challenge with my website members focusing on health and wellness habits as dove in deeper to healthy relationships with food. We asked ourselves the questions I just asked you and have to say, we all felt it was so complicated.

It feels complicated to know what loving food but keeping it in its rightful place is truly like. Most members said "I have a complicated relationship with food" or "I love food but it hates me."

Doesn't it make sense that we would have a mix of emotions with food when there is a history of weight gain, diets, exercise plans, trainers, new diet, weight gain. The cycle is an emotional battle field that often leaves wounds of guilt and shame.

Even after weight loss surgery the deep emotional roots of a relationship with food can be hard to repair. This is what we talked about over the month of our Focus challenge. We knew we would not solve all of the questions but felt it was worth talking about and asking ourself where we could feel more at peace with food.



The goodness of food

What good things can you say about food?

I am not a licensed therapist. I am a registered dietitian and a bariatric food coach. I am also a wife, a daughter, a sister and a friend. If someone in my life was struggling in a relationship in their life, I would listen. I would give the time to let out frustrations and emotions.

I may also ask them what they like about that person. Not because I want them to just focus on the positive, but maybe to help them see what they do value about that person even if there are areas they want to see change.

It can be really helpful to remember the good qualities about someone, even when you are frustrated with them.

What are the helpful qualities of food?

Food is fuel. Yes. However, it is so much MORE than just fuel.

Take a moment and think about how you would answer the question:

What are the good things food has to offer?



- It brings people together! Holidays with families, lunches with co-workers, dinner with friends
- We feel our best when we are well fed
- We have a clear mind (hanger is a real thing)
- Flavor! It is pleasurable and enjoyable
- It brings a break in the day when we stop our busy schedule to enjoy a meal
- It's a common need for everyone. Every race, gender, age needs food every day.
- It tells us about cultures. We travel to new places and we want to know about the food.
- It's a sign of celebration. A feast, a party, a milestone in someone's life.
- It's a way to show comfort and care to others. Bringing someone a meal in a difficult time is a powerful practice to give and receive
- It's a way to make a living! (Thank you farmers!) Food service industry, grocery stores even personal grocery shoppers (thank you InstaCart!)

I feel the list could go on but does that feel helpful? To stop and think about what food brings to your life? I think about the meals that have been prepared for me and the memorable meals where I spent time laughing and talking with friends and family over food. There is much good to celebrate.



Have we made food good versus evil?

Let's just say it. There are some food that are just plain bad for us. Deep fried twinkies, I'm looking at you.

Those foods aside, I wonder, has our culture of dieting put foods into the good versus bad category a little *too* much that it leads us to thinking WE are bad for linking foods in the wrong category?

(Also, does everyone these days seem to be an expert on what foods to eat and not eat?)

Yes, I am a dietitian and yes, I do focus on certain foods like lean protein and vegetables over foods with high amounts of starch and sugar. I am certainly encouraging patients to avoid certain foods for better hunger control and weight control.

What I wonder is this: is it possible to change the language from good versus evil to **"this one is not for me."**

Hang with me here. Think about walking into a grocery store right now. How many different items do you think they have on the shelves? It feels like it would take a lifetime to try every thing they sell! Which means, they are stocking food for a large variety of people because everyone is buying food **that fits them**. If we can see (most) all food as GOOD but accept that not all of it is *for me*, maybe we can shake off the shame a little more easily

...and start to repair the relationship with food.





Relationships have healthy parts, and unhealthy parts.

What relationship is not complicated?

When I posted in our members group asking what came to mind when people considered their relationship with food, many put the simple answer "it's complicated."

Think of your marriage, your friendships, your mom and siblings. People, emotions, situations are very multi-facted. There may even be relationship in your life that are complicated *especially* with food. Have you had a loved one make an unwanted comment about food? Ugh. It's complicated.

The unhealthy parts are often marked with anxiety.

Speaking as a sister, friend and dietitian who works with people everyday, I often see the unhealthy or complicated areas of relationships as the ones that bring up anxious thoughts or feelings.

I see this happening big time around food. Of course we love food. We just covered all the reasons food is GOOD! The areas that make food complicated lie in the anxious thoughts of "eating the right thing" and avoiding weight gain like the plague.

Anxiety often comes from the feeling of the unknown or the feeling of not being in control. When you have a history of dieting for decades it can be overwhelming to consider which program or which trick or which food is on what program. We feel bombarded with messages of "this food is actually not good for you after all" and "these are the ten foods you need to be eating!" When you feel like you do not know or you feel like you are not in control, it is very difficult to not feel anxious.

This is why I think it really matters to keep things simple.



Keeping it simple in the journey

There are some things we cannot control. Some meals we did not make or some restaurants we are at with family that we did not pick. However, if we step back a moment and keep things simple, it does help to bring in a sense of more control. Taking it back to basics helps in releasing anxiety and being at peace with food decisions.

One a large view, if you are feeling anxious about your weight as a whole and overwhelmed with losing regained weight or achieve a goal you have set out for yourself, there are three things I want to encourage you to do.

First, I like to ask **what is the priority today**. If you are feeling anxious about your weight loss journey as a whole, remember that you can only do so much in the present moment.

Second, remind yourself to **trust in the process**. There is no new information that you will read on social media today that will be the change you need to make to see more results. Put your filters on and remember to go back to the basics of good nutrition (which I will review shortly!)

Third, **go get your mind off of it**. Weight loss really can become consuming. We get excited to see progress! We want the numbers to keep moving. We don't want to lose motivation. We look at other success stories to stay inspired. Healthy doses of considering your progress and your journey is a great idea but you know when you are letting it take over too much of your time or attention. If you feel most of your conversations are turning to your weight, it might be time to go read a new book, see a movie, call a friend or plan your next trip to help yourself stay mentally balanced.

Those are three tips for keeping it simple in the bigger picture of the journey. Now I want to cover keeping it simple in your nutrition and your food choices.



Keeping it simple in your food

Keeping it simple to me, means reviewing the basics. These are the things about food that are so basic, you can recite it in your head when you only have a quick moment to make a clear decision.

Like I mentioned previously, there is no new information that is going to change the way you do things despite the click bait post someone just shared on Facebook. Make sure you have your "red flags" go off if something sounds too good to be true.

Every program does differ. Surgeons and dietitians have different approaches and styles and most can explain why they approach it differently. Try not to get lost in the weeds with the specific pieces but instead find your unique style of how staying hydrated and focusing on quality food will look like for you.

My personal approach to bariatric nutrition is to keep it simple. Instead of counting calories, grams or ounces, I like to focus on **quality over quantity**. This means I encourage patients to eat two bites of protein to every one bite of vegetable. This ratio approach of 2:1 allows patients to listen to their own natural stopping cues instead of a pre-set portion size someone else gave them.

I love this approach for many reasons including that it's simple enough that it doesn't change no matter how far out someone is from surgery. If someone is 6 weeks out or 6 years out, the ratio is the same. Focus on a 2:1 ratio of protein to vegetable. Take small bites, eat slowly, avoid fluids and listen to your body for the natural stopping point.





Here is a bulleted list of my "post-op basics"

- 3 meals a day (snacks if needed only for true physical hunger)
- 2 bites protein to 1 bite vegetable (or fruit once per day)
- Take small bites, eat slowly and stop at fullness
- Limit heart healthy fats to 2-3 per day (portion sizes are listed on the bariatric food list for members)
- Drink plenty of fluids (64-96 oz) *I'm okay with drinking to the first bite of the meal but avoiding fluids with the meal and 45-60 minutes afterwards for better hunger control*

That is my keep it simple list.

Sure, it will bring up more questions such as "what about recipes that are all mixed in together?"

Just keep it simple. Focus on the protein the most and listen to your fullness cues. This approach helps you to enjoy the food without the numbers and to trust your own cues instead of how much you *think* you are supposed to eat. In my personal and professional experience, this is approach brings freedom!



Simple does not mean black and white

After decades of diet plans, it can be tempting to make simple mean black and white. We take bulleted lists like the one above and make it a list of do's and don'ts.

Don't.

Healthy living is finding a balance of making choices that are in favor of your mind and your body.

Healthy living is being at peace with food **while enjoying it** and spending more time eating the foods that bring us better health.

If food was really "just fuel" it would be easy to make it black and white and just do what we are supposed to.

That's not real life and that's not how our human minds and bodies work! Yes, set your environment up for success and keep it simple with the basic guidelines of 2:1 protein to vegetables and focusing on water. Also walk in grace that there is more peace in not overthinking things. Make decisions to the best of your ability, listen to your body and try to get your mind onto other things.





Freedom from Numbers

I mentioned I do not count calories, grams or ounces in my approach to bariatric nutrition. Let me take a section of this little book to explain more.

Let's take a moment and confirm that science is correct when it comes to calories in and calories out. We know if less calories are consumed than eaten, there is a calorie deficit and therefore weight loss.

If you eat more calories than you burn you gain weight. If you eat the same calories that you burn, there is no weight change.

In a sense, it should be a simple math equation. Eat less calories than you burn. Case closed, let's move on!

If this simple math equation translated into real life scenarios, I don't believe we would be in such a battle against the disease of obesity. As we continue to learn about obesity, the more complex we are understanding it to be. There are hormones, genetics, environment and more at play. More on that to come.

My point here is that the simple math equation is not helpful to all personalities and all walks of life. *Some personality types DO thrive with strict and clear numbers. I'm looking at you accountants and actuaries!*

For many others, giving up calorie counting might just be the freedom they need to walk out healthy living in a new way. If you are someone who has counted calories for years, this might seem scary. To you I want to say, giving up calories is not a sentence to weight gain. When you focus on lean protein and vegetables and listen to your body's natural fullness cues, the calories work themselves out on their own without need to count them.

Keeping it simple by focusing on protein, vegetables, water and listening to natural fullness cues instead of weight portions is **a different way of getting to the same goal.**

Controlled hunger means less calorie intake.

If we can control hunger, we can start to feel in control of food.

— Steph Wagner, MS RDN

Controlling hunger is the key and can be done with focusing on protein at meals, fluids outside of meals and doing our darnedest to avoid starchy foods and sweets that drive hunger up.

What about food journals?

There are still numbers that are certainly helpful. I do feel nutrition labels have their place because not everything at the store is a piece of meat or a vegetable! This is why I have a video course on Bariatric Food Coach entitled "Reading Nutrition Labels After Weight Loss Surgery." I cover food items such as condiments, pre-made meals, protein supplements, salad dressing and so on.

Food journals are albeit, not fun to keep, but an incredibly valuable tool for our health. Keeping record helps us to review and make clear decisions rather than using our emotions to identify how things are going. Dietitians and other health care providers can bring better care with notes or records. This is true for food, blood sugars, blood pressure, sleep and so forth. We know more when there is a track record.

The accountability piece of food journal is also very powerful. Most patients who have focused on a weight loss program agree the accountability of writing food down makes them think about the choice they are about to make. *Many patients also agree it is hard to keep up with food journaling! You just get back to it and keep trying to find your style.*

The one drawback to food journaling is that the numbers will pop up. It will show you calories in a day. It will have big numbers of carbohydrate grams and fat grams. In a journey of trying to keep things simple and not let the numbers overtake you, it is still a tricky spot to see all those numbers pop up on your screen.



What I can tell you is this. When I look over a food journal for a member, I ignore all the numbers and go straight to the food. I scroll past all of it and review if they are having three meals a day and if there are any starchy foods or sweets sneaking in. I can typically guess how the macronutrient pie chart will look by a quick glance at their meal structure and food intake.

Once I see what they are eating, *then* I glance at the pie chart for protein, carbohydrates and fat. I like to look at it at a daily view, a weekly view and a monthly view. Not every day will be perfect but if I look over a week or month at a time, I can get a better idea of what is going on most often.

Starting with looking at the food helps me to keep it simple. Are they eating chicken breast and green beans at dinner or a protein bar three times a day? A pie chart can be a helpful framework to review and make decisions for changes that could help, but looking at the food itself will give far more information.

With all that being said, I use a basic guideline of 50% protein, 20% carbohydrate and 30% fat. This is just a reference scale to review food choices against, not numbers to stress over. Focus on quality food, listen to your natural stopping point, keep a journal for record keeping and accountability and review the macros at the end of the week or month to see if anything is surprising you.

Remember to keep it simple:

- What is your priority for today
- Trust the process
- Get your mind on something else



Creativity with Food

Our history with dieting

Circling back around to the good qualities of food, I would love to take a closer look at the power of being creative with food can be.

Taking a step back, think about your own past history with diet plans. On our live coaching call for this particular topic we did an icebreaker about the weirdest diet plans we had been on, and the age of our first diet plan. We laughed over the grapefruit diet, the milkshake diet, cabbage soup diet, ear stapling (still have not figured that one out) and even seeing a hypnotist. Members shared they had been as young as 10 and 12 when they started their first weight loss program.

Weight loss and the efforts to lose weight are relatively young in the scope of history. The rise of diet plans was really in the 80s which means we just did not know. In the more recent years we are starting to develop more language of "diet" being a bad word and everything in moderation. More and more people are taking blood tests to identify what foods they are most sensitive to. Food and weight loss culture really is fascinating when you step back and look over the big pictures of what becomes popular and why.

Personally, I do think the word diet is unappetizing (pun intended) but I also feel everything in moderation does not really help in a battle against obesity. It really is a battle and we do have to be more vigilant because some food cause hunger, cravings, blood sugar swings and weight gain.

Where is the middle ground between not "being on a diet" but also avoiding certain foods. I mentioned earlier there could be a change in language such as "this food is not for me" to help not make the food evil, but rather identify that it is not helpful for your body systems. I would like to take it a step farther and add on that we can see a lot of benefit to focusing on the foods that **are** for you and lessen the focus on the ones that are not.

Bringing creativity into your foods will help you enjoy what you can have and feel less discouraged by the ones you want to avoid.



Viewing food differently

To change the way we view food is not a simple process. It does matter the language that we use around food even in our own heads. I've found it helpful to look at things from a non-food view point altogether to make it less emotions.

My husband and I have very different interest when it comes to movies. This is mostly my fault as I get easily stressed out, I do not love violence, I get uncomfortable with awkward scenes or too much nudity. I ask him to stick to "feel goods" and that I do really like Tom Hanks movies. Every once in a while I will indulge him in a Marvel movie or Star Wars because I really do love him.

Those others movies are just not for me. If someone at an event was talking all about how great this new movie was, it might peak my interest momentarily but more often than not as they describe the movie further I think to myself "that does not sound like it is for me." Yes, I do prefer Hallmark Christmas movies and classic kid movies like The Sandlot. These movies are good for me. They make me feel good and I feel more relaxed after watching one instead of stressed or sad.

My point is this: there are foods that do make you feel good. There are foods that are for you. There are foods that you can enjoy, savor, have fun with and share with others. Foods that have great flavor and texture as well as great nutrition.

Spend less time thinking about the foods that are not for you. Turn your mind to the ones that **do** leave you feeling great and are best for your overall body systems. Yes, there will be times the most popular food item that every one is talking about is not for you. Try your best to dust it off and be at peace.





How to cultivate creativity in food

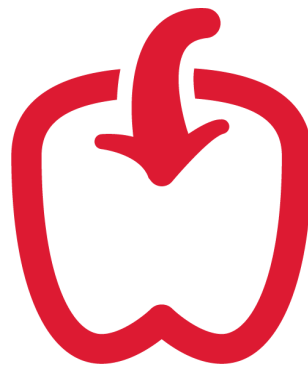
Food is an incredible outlet of creativity no matter what your skill level is. Even if you are new to cooking, you are taking something and bringing to its full potential. Don't compare your creation to someone else, instead enjoy what you took from unprepared to dinner time.

We can be so critical of ourselves! This was overcooked. This needed more seasoning. The sauce is not right.

You can certainly take notes, adjust the food to your preference or chalk it up to not a good meal and move on with your life. One reason I love using food as a creative outlet is because it is a low risk endeavor. You always have another chance tomorrow.

One way you can think about the creativity of food is thinking about being the next step in the process of creating that food into a meal. Perhaps it sounds cheesy but I think it can help in your relationship with food when you consider where it started. Someone planted that seed, watered that plant, pulled that zucchini, sold it which provided for families and supported the economy. You are taking what someone else started when you slice that zucchini, season it and put it on the grill.

Sure, cooking can feel like a chore. I mean it actually is a one. It is a responsibility to our bodies and possibly the other bodies we feed. I do think it matters to consider how often you truly want to be in the kitchen cooking. Set a small and realistic amount of nights for yourself to allow yourself time to enjoy the process. If it starts to feel like drudgery, go back to your basic recipes of taco meat or hamburger patties. Double up those recipes to give yourself a night off.





If you feel you can reasonable cook three nights a week, put it on your schedule so you have time to clear your mind and focus on your work. My personal weekly schedule is to gather some recipes on Sunday evening and sketch out our plan for the week. I find making two new recipes a week is plenty and the other nights I will make something I have memorized. We do a "no cook" Sunday and pull out paper plates, order some barbecue turkey with green beans or a fresh Mediterranean salad from a local restaurant. I always look forward to no cook Sunday's and feel ready to plan my menu again at the end of the day.

What is your style?

How often do you really want to cook? What recipes do you have memorized that you could get done quickly?

Batch cooking, slow cookers and pressure cookers are a huge help. During grilling season I love to add extra chicken breast, hamburger patties or pork chops and look forward to simply tossing a salad and having extra time the next night.

My current lifestyle means I am often ordering my groceries to be delivered thanks to InstaCart. Many members use grocery pickup for both convenience and less temptation to walk around the aisle. That being said, I do think it can really help to carve out a big chunk of time to go wander the grocery store to get fresh ideas and see what might be new. Seasonings, spices, dry rubs, pre-prepped meals in the deli section. If you feel stuck in a creative rut, schedule a time to wander the grocery store *when you're not hungry of course!*

It's true with my children and I believe it's true with adults. The key to taking something away? Replace it with something better. Go have fun with lean protein, fresh vegetables, a little fruit and heart healthy fats! Herbs, spices, marinades and rubs will keep variety and excitement in the foods that are FOR you!



Adapting recipes online

Pinterest is just the best for recipe shopping. It can be overwhelming but a few right keywords and you end up on the best bunny trail of recipes.

I wanted to share a few common swaps I make when I'm looking for recipes online. Sometimes an ingredient can just be omitted altogether (rice, potato, pasta) or a simple swap will make it a "for you" option.

Common swaps I make:

- Parmesan cheese instead of breadcrumbs
- Laughing Cow Cheese® instead of cream cheese
- Greek yogurt instead of sour cream or mayonnaise (depends on the recipe)
- Zucchini noodles for pasta
- Cauliflower rice for rice
- Creamy Mashed Cauliflower for potatoes (recipe on Bariatric Food Coach)

Go enjoy some Pinterest time and practice! Organize your boards with cooking method or even season so you can easily find recipes that fit your mood that week.



Planning and saving menus

I mentioned making a realistic goal for how many nights you will cook. We talked about finding time to look for recipes, make a menu and grocery pickup or taking time to shop.

Take a moment and write down on your schedule when it would make most sense for you to browse recipes, make a menu and shop. You may already do this but review if it is still working how you would like. Personally I like to split up these tasks. I look for recipes on different days than I make a menu. I typically make a menu on Sunday night but I fill up my online cart on Monday morning. It feels like it is taking too long when I do all of it at one sitting.

Which brings me to my next point.

Save your menus!!!

I will admit I have made many a menu and never looked back. Having a system to save your menus should be simple enough that it becomes natural. Maybe you wrote it down in your planner. When you sit down to make your next menu, open a Word document and type up what you did last week. Make a note where the recipe was in case you think you will forget. You can even highlight the name of the recipe and hit "control K" to add a link to that recipe.

Just think, if you had a word document with a list of what you cooked the last several weeks with a link to the recipe how convenient would that be? Save your notes, save your menu, rotate the same few menus. A little work really does go a long way!



Invest in Good Kitchen Tools

My husband and I tend to nerd out over our tools. His tools are in the garage and my tools are in the kitchen.

Making a creative meal, a quick meal, a healthy meal is just plain more fun with good tools. Invest in your equipment and you will really enjoy the process more. Think of the money you save by eating at home and then buy yourself a good pair of kitchen shears!

Make an inventory of what items you need or want to upgrade in your kitchen. Anything that helps with chopping and dicing will make you happy. Think knives, shears, cutting mats, meat shredders and so on.

Ask people who love to cook what items they use the most! Foodies really know good equipment. Ask about brands, read reviews online and think about what tasks you are doing most often in your kitchen that feel time consuming. List them out in order of importance and buy one item at a time as your budget allows! These items are also great incentive items for reaching goals on your journey. Members often buy a new item as their prize when they complete a Get Focused Challenge with me.



Keep it simple, but it is more complicated than we know

Biology and Hunger

This might feel like an odd topic to end with but I do feel it's important to highlight that our relationship with food is not just mental.

It's biological.

There are many physical experiences going on when we eat and even when we have not eaten. Research is high in this area as we are still learning about fat cells, hormones and endocrine systems as a whole.

This type of information can be a mixture of fascinating, boring and hard to follow! Let's keep it simple and remember the overarching theme is this: **there is more going on in our bodies than we know**. It is not just about willpower.

There are three hormones I would like to point to: ghrelin, leptin and dopamine.

Ghrelin, the hunger hormone

You may have heard of this one. I remember it as the "hunger gremlins" that drive up hunger. I think of "hanger" and that shaky, fuzzy feeling if it has been too long since my body had food.

Surgeons often talk about ghrelin as it does decrease after surgery, especially in a Gastric sleeve where much of the stomach is removed. This is the reason many patients experience less hunger after weight loss surgery and the reason we also call weight loss surgery a "metabolic surgery" because it does change metabolic processes.

Here is a little more about ghrelin:

- It is secreted in the stomach lining and travels through the blood to your brain telling you it's time to eat
- It works in a cycle increasing before meal times and dropping for about 3 hours after a meal
- If you are feeling true hunger and dinner is not for an hour or so, go ahead and eat something. It is a short acting hormone which means it will build and build, there is no cap (*hello hanger*)

I think it's important to note this interesting fact. It might seem if someone is struggling with obesity they have a lot of ghrelin. Actually, it seems there is not more ghrelin but instead that there is more *sensitivity* to ghrelin.

Personally I have always felt like a hungrier person. It brings me a little relief to think maybe it's just who I am that I am more sensitive to my hunger hormone than those who might be able to eat less and not feel as bothered by still feeling hungry. It does bring a bit of relief to think it is not just our fault. There is more to the equation.

Leptin, the satiety hormone

If we refer to ghrelin as the hunger hormone, it might be safe to call leptin the "satiety" hormone. Satiety is the feeling of fullness. You feel satiated or "satisfied."

We often push through satisfied and go to feeling FULL. That is another story.

What I find fascinating about leptin is that it was the first hormone related to hunger and fullness that was ever discovered. You know when it was discovered? 1994.

Does this blow your mind like it did mine? It reminds me that we really are still figuring out obesity. The first hormone related to hunger and fullness was discovered when Friends was the most watched TV show. Since then, many others have been discovered!



Leptin is produced by fat cells (different from ghrelin which is secreted in the stomach). Fat cells in the body used to be considered "benign" having only to do with insulating the body. Now we know that fat is an **endocrine organ** which means it is very intricate, elegant and produces a large amount of hormones.

Here is a fascinating one on leptin and obesity. Remember I mentioned someone struggling with obesity might not have more ghrelin, but be more sensitive to it? With leptin, since it is produced by fat cells, we might think someone with a high amount of fat cells would have a lot of leptin which means they should be feeling satisfied and satiated more easily.

Not the case. The body's cells actually develop **leptin resistance** in which the leptin receptors do not bind with the leptin to receive the signal of fullness.

Someone may be more sensitive to the "hunger hormone" and gain weight. The more weight they gain, the more leptin resistant they may become and therefore not feeling satisfied. So, is obesity still about self control and willpower? It's so complicated!

Dopamine, the reward hormone

Dopamine is not a hormone coming from the stomach or the fat cells. This is a brain hormone. This is the 'pleasure center' of the brain that allows us to feel good. It helps us to enjoy, feel happy, feel pleasure. It's a great hormone!

What does this have to do with hunger and fullness?

Dopamine is interconnected because it directly activates pleasure centers in the brain that affect both mood and food intake. Eating increases dopamine.

Many studies show even more dopamine is released when we eat high fat and high sugar foods. This is what makes them addictive.



By the way, in a study using a high protein breakfast, a "normal" protein breakfast and skipping breakfast altogether, it was found that the high protein breakfast was best at reducing post-meal cravings and increasing dopamine levels. You get to experience the positive benefits of dopamine without the cravings. Another point for protein!

Genetics

Finally, I find it interesting to talk about the genetic factors at play. This is yet another area that can get confusing and I do not want to get too far in the weeds but further the point that there is much more to the equation of hunger and food relationships.

Genetics can affect how dopamine and other brain hormones work.

Someone's genetics may give them fewer dopamine receptors which can contribute to addiction risk. This could be addiction to food, alcohol or drugs. This is why transfer addiction is a serious topic after bariatric surgery and something surgeons and support staff should talk about with their patients.

Having fewer dopamine receptors is just one among many possible genetic variants. Another is the FTO (fat-mass and obesity-associated) gene. In a Swedish study published in 2014, it found those who had one variant had higher levels of ghrelin and lower levels of leptin compared to those without the variant.

The body is so intricate and complex!

I do believe it's more complicated than to say "eat less and work out more" but also stand by the approach of keeping it simple. Genetics is not always destiny.



Set up your home environment for your success. Gain support from friends and understanding from family. Focus on stress management and all these efforts can overcome genetics.

Bariatric surgery is a metabolic surgery. It does reduce ghrelin and losing weight does improve leptin resistance. Your surgical tool is your best weapon at hunger control.

At the end of the day, keep it simple.

Water is the best appetite suppressant of all and your body usually wants more. Lean and solid protein will increase dopamine levels and provided prolonged fullness. Controlling your hunger means controlling your weight.

If you fall off track and have high fat, high sugar foods, you are always a week away from feeling better!

The best thing you can do is lean into your pouch's benefits and utilize it for hunger control (see the members course on Hunger!)

Obesity affects 93 million Americans. It is a complicated disease and it is not all your fault. If we had all the answers, we would be winning the war on obesity instead of struggling to turn our Nation's numbers around. It is more than willpower, self control, eating less and working out harder. When we start to believe that for ourselves, we can empower those around us! There ARE things you can do, but it is not all your fault.

This ebook is a summary of the live chat sessions during the February 2020 Get Focused Challenge for Bariatric Food Coach members.

References:

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Read more [in this article "Appetite Hormones" by Marsha McCulloch, MS, RD, LD](#)

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