Emotional Eating after Bariatric Surgery Video Course

Script for the Lesson 2: Boredom Eating

When I decided to do a challenge focused on emotional eating, I sent a survey out asking patients what emotion drives them to eat the most? I was just sure I knew the answer. I was already scripting in my head what I would teach about stress eating. But as the survey results came in, I was wrong. Stress was certainly on the list but boredom was far and away number one.

Granted, the survey was sent in January. It leaves me to wonder if it would be different at other times in the year! Nonetheless, its safe to say this is a really common emotion that drives us to eat.

Why?

What is going on that our brain is sending signals to us that we should eat something.

Why, when you ate dinner not long ago, do you feel compelled to eat?

Remember our powerful friend dopamine? Well, it seems dopamine levels drop when our brains aren’t stimulated, such as when we’re bored. Our body gets a trigger to take an action that will bring pleasure because dopamine has dropped. Something pleasurable will bring it back up.

To make matters more tricky, if we constantly use the same experience to help provide the pleasure that brings up the dopamine (like snacking) it becomes more reinforced in the brain. So the more its reinforced, the more we turn to eating when we’re bored.

But once again, knowledge can be really powerful. If we know that boredom means a drop in dopamine because your brain isn’t engaged and we want to break the habit of eating, we can make a list and consciously make the choice to do something else we find pleasurable.

So when we say “I need to do something in the evenings to keep my ands busy so I don’t eat” it’s even more true than just keeping hands busy. Sure, you don’t want to get snacks on your quilt project but more than that, if you enjoy quilting your engaging your brain, you may not feel that trigger for something pleasurable anyway!

This is the homework for if you’re a bored eater.

One, Write down the times you are most likely to be bored. In fact, notice when you are eating out of boredom!

Two, Make a list of things you truly enjoy, things that bring you pleasure. This could be sorting through old photos or calling friends, restoring furniture or water color painting. Reading a good book or planning a trip. Bariatric physiologist Dr Jim Keller recommends dividing your list into 30 second activities, 30 minute activities and 3 hour activities. This helps you based on the amount of time you need to fill. Someone might have golf on their list of 3 hour activities and making photo books on their 30 minute activities. They might have reading a daily bible verse on their list of 3 minute activities!

Finally, if you have a certain routine or area in your house where you most often eat for boredom, break the routine by going to a different room or sitting in a different chair. Breaking small habits in your routine can break those connections in the brain that tell you its time to eat!

Stay tuned, next time we will talk about the emotion I thought would be number one because in the end, it was number two! Stress eating.