

Am I An Emotionally Addicted Eater...

...or do I just make poor food choices?

Sorry this is a little rambly, it's a combination of three posts that say essentially the same thing, but I think none of them can be repeated often enough.

Here's the simplest way you might be able to tell, as well as the best as way to stick to healthy lowcarb eating for the rest of your life, whether your food issues are emotional or not: Make all your eating plans and decisions at least 24 hours in advance.

If you have all your food decided and ready to eat at the beginning of each day, there would never be a reason for you to eat off plan. If you then never again eat one thing off that plan, then I would say you are **not** much of an emotional eater. Your issues with food apparently are/were almost 100% physiological in nature. Remove the problem foods from your life and your weight/health problems are solved. Period.

But if you choose to eat something that you didn't plan the day before, despite there being absolutely no reason for you to have done so—the right food choices were available to you because you made that happen ahead of time---then obviously you made an emotional eating decision, and that makes you an emotional eater.

Severing my emotions from eating was the biggest challenge of my journey, but I think it was vital to go through. It didn't happen overnight, and honestly I didn't even set out to do that, it just happened when I found a way—THE ONLY way for me—to stick to the diet that I finally acknowledged I would have to eat if I wanted to be thin, if I wanted the wish I'd had for almost 30 years to come true and stay true. That was to have a plan and stick to it, no matter how difficult or embarrassing it was, no matter whether it was what the other people I was with were eating or not. *Eventually* the feelings and emotions I was not wanting to feel by distracting myself with emotional eating decisions came out, they had been buried pretty deep! But now that I know what they are/were I have been able to have them, feel them, and handle them in much more appropriate ways, ways that don't hurt my body or anybody else.

I found out that for me, a lot of this was about learning to be comfortable with *being* uncomfortable.

Meanwhile, the social awkwardness from doing that is pretty much over—I went through it once instead of going back and forth, on and off the diet, which is the “dance” I had been doing for 30 years.

Over time, my family and friends have come to accept this as a fact about me, that I don't eat the way most people do, and it's no longer a big deal, it isn't *any* kind of deal as far as I can tell. And by the way, I never say "can't eat that" because can't indicates something big, bad and intangible out there trying to control me—while saying "I don't

eat that" more accurately portrays a decision, one that isn't open for discussion, whims, or any attempts at giving me some kind of permission to change my mind.

I found there was a learning curve and adjustment time for them as well as me on this big change in my behavior, and that it was a little difficult at first, but that I had to allow friends and family members the time to learn and adjust to this new truth about me. It was a kind of social "risk"—of losing admiration or social standing and whatever else it is we get from our social lives. But slowly they came around to see that this wasn't about them, it was only about me, that just because I didn't eat, say, their birthday cake, I still came to the party, I was present for the ritual/celebration.

I've lost no friends over this and my social life is plenty busy. I'm a relatively new empty nester and very much enjoying the new social flexibility and freedom. I've become fairly adept at explaining this to new social acquaintances when it comes up, and my "old" people (all still around because I work at the same place I've worked for 19 years), so slowly this has become mostly no big deal.

It sure WAS a big deal at first, these are big, hard, scary and sometimes awkward changes, but they can be done. For me they HAD to be done to get what I finally decided I wanted more than anything else. I was determined (and naive) enough to think that if I lost weight, everything would be better, almost perfect, in my life. Well along the way I found out I was wrong about that, I have problems and emotional issues I was not facing by eating, BUT, like one long-time lowcarb success I know used as her tag-line, nothing is easier when you're FAT. She's right, but that does not = everything is great when you're thin. SOME things, you will find, are worse than you thought.

So if you're fairly new to this lowcarb life, you may be wondering what kind of eater you are. It can be surprisingly difficult to see at first. Both kinds of eaters respond well to beginning lowcarb, it's not always immediately discernable. The differences often don't become apparent until much further along in the journey. But here are some things I think are important to consider in this:

- I'd guess that about 80-90% of overweight people are what I term emotionally addicted eaters. I also believe that there are addicted eaters who are not overweight. Overweight is merely one symptom that happens to *some* people who eat addictively, not all. The 10-20% of overweight people who are not emotionally addicted eaters often find that lowcarb fixes their body's problems and they are basically delighted with it **and** able to follow it with minimal fuss and perceived sacrifice to keep their weight down for the rest of their lives.
- You can't go wrong *assuming* you're an addicted eater and behaving accordingly.
- If you are just beginning lowcarb, it may be too early to tell if YOU are an addicted eater; usually it's something we learn the hard way, via hindsight, most of us bring much denial to this (I sure did). And of course, there's not a whole lot of support out

there in the world that wholly accepts this as an addiction, one which requires a certain kind of abstinence.

Anyway, in my opinion, if you've ever gone off lowcarb for any reason and had serious difficulty getting right back on it, well, there's the BIGGEST clue.

A lot of struggling dieters, when faced with the question of whether or not they are emotionally addicted, will say something like "I am having a hard time wrapping my brain around the whole concept of food as an *addiction*." You'll see a lot of addicts try hard to *understand* or explain (excuse) their way around or out of abstinence 24/7/365.

An interesting phenomenon to me is that those of us who believe we are addicts, and have managed to get our weight off with an abstinent lowcarb approach, have found that *understanding* our addiction was **not** a first step or key to our success, although some surprising personal insights about this have come over time for each of us. What made the success AND the slow-growing personal clarity possible was leading with an abstinent diet. We learned that just like any other substance/behavior addicts, the moment the abstinence ends, so does the clarity and understanding, and the ability to return to abstinence is seriously compromised.

Finally, for what it's worth, I do not believe in the concept of "**carb** addiction." Broccoli is a carb, I have yet to see anyone addicted to broccoli. Cream/cheese/butter, mayonnaise, nuts and artificial sweeteners have few or no carbs, I have certainly seen countless lowcarbers become addicted to those.

Bottom Line: I've yet to see anyone do poorly by assuming she is an addict and choosing accordingly; but I certainly have seen disaster after disaster by individuals assuming they were not.

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