

The Diet Mentality

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Low carb, low fat, the Zone, South Beach or the diet of the moment--What is a body to do? Recent research has shown that those who follow the Atkins diet, which provides faster weight loss in the short-term, are no better off after one year than their counterparts who follow traditional lower calorie diets. While each approach may have some sound principles to teach us, it is clear that nothing is clear when it comes to weight loss.

I believe that when scientists and diet gurus finally find the "magic diet", it will be what we've known all along. The most effective way to lose weight is to eat less and exercise more. There is nothing magical about grapefruit or carbohydrate avoidance or low fat programs. There are no magic pills, as infomercials would have you believe, that magically take off weight while you sleep. It is about the way you interact with food and eating, and I am going to tell you how to develop a healthy relationship between yourself and food.

The Diet Mentality is the part of your brain that sees things in black and white terms. You are either "on" the diet, or you are "off" it. You are either "good" or "bad" depending on your weight or how well you are sticking to your diet. And foods are either "good" or "bad", as well. You become disgusted with yourself when you go "off" your diet or eat a "bad" food. When you go off your diet by eating a "bad" food, you decide that you have broken the diet anyway, so you may as well eat anything that you like. And then you feel even worse. The Diet Mentality is often the engine that drives the cycle of unrealistic expectations, broken promises and failure.

The alternative to the Diet Mentality is the conscious creation of a healthy relationship with food. It means that you no longer see things as black and white, good and bad. It means that you commit to make attitudinal and behavioral changes that support creating the new you.

The first step in changing your attitude in order to achieve long-term success is what I call "making friends with food". It means that you understand that food is nourishment and necessary for survival. It requires acknowledging that it is okay to enjoy preparing and eating food. Mostly, it means no longer choosing to be a slave to food and deciding to be its master. It means empowerment. It means recognizing that your relationship with food is a series of choices that can lead you to the outcome you desire. It means that you can give up short-term satisfaction in order to obtain long-term goals.

When you allow yourself to go beyond the Diet Mentality, you can begin to think like a thin person. You can change your self-talk from negative to positive. You can identify and alter thoughts, feelings and behaviors. You can set realistic goals, while enjoying the successes along the way. You can choose to eat in response to internal cues of hunger and fullness and choose not to eat for other reasons. You can learn to identify emotions or

situations that trigger unhealthy eating. Like a naturally thin person, you can stop emotional or stress eating and learn to eat in order to nourish your body.

While the answer for each person is highly individual, the process is very similar. First you must identify where you are and where you want to go. Next, you must make a commitment to change. A psychotherapist who specializes in weight issues can be very helpful in assisting you to identify ineffective thoughts, behaviors and habits and to create positive strategies for motivation and change. Within the psychotherapeutic relationship, you can discover the naturally thin person inside. Some common therapeutic techniques in weight management include behavior modification, cognitive therapy and clinical hypnosis.

Sandy is a Licensed Professional Counselor with twenty years of experience in private practice. Sandy specializes in phobias, weight management, stress management, hypnosis, smoking cessation, pain control, career counseling, depression, self-esteem issues, divorce adjustment, affairs, eating disorders, adolescent issues, anxiety, marital counseling and corporate management training and consulting. Sandy has conducted the Fear of Flying workshops provided by the Omaha Airport Authority. She has also conducted groups on "Developing a Healthy Relationship With Food".

Sandy sees clients by appointment by calling 334-1122.

There are nine therapists on staff at Associated Counseling Professionals who cover a variety of mental health issues. They offer assessment and psychotherapy (including EMDR and clinical hypnosis) to deal with the above-mentioned issues, They offer hypnosis for habit and symptom reduction-weight loss, smoking cessation, childbirth, fear of flying or public speaking, to name a few. Each therapist is licensed through the state of Nebraska in his or her respective profession.