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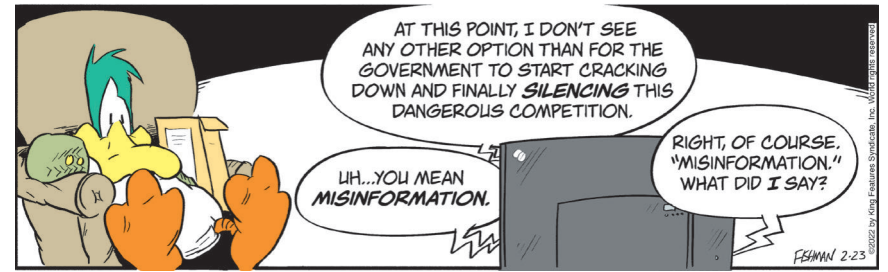
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By Loren Fishman



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A VIEW FROM VILLAGES HEALTH

Many of us have eaten food for comfort. We felt stressed, anxious or sad and headed for the kitchen. Eating our favorite sweet treat or salty snack alleviated those negative feelings — temporarily.



Lucy Rathier

COMMENTARY

We know what happens next. Feelings of guilt and discouragement emerge after deviating from our healthy food plan. Feeling defeated, we eat more. Now, there are two problems: the thing that upset us in the first place and the added distress from going off a diet yet again. Would you still call emotional eating a workable strategy when all it does is add more problems? That doesn't seem so comforting.

According to research, emotional eaters were less likely to lose weight and more likely to regain weight lost when compared to people who did not engage in unplanned eating

when upset. Difficulty maintaining weight loss in the long run may stem from an inability to exert behavioral self-control in the face of biological responses to cravings and unpleasant emotions (e.g., stress, boredom) as well as environmental triggers such as processed foods high in sugar and fat and labor-saving devices (e.g., remote controls, smartphone technology). Studies show that most overweight individuals show high levels of "food cravings," which are addiction-like symptoms toward food. This condition leads to an increasing desire to eat to control uncomfortable feelings and negative emotional states.

The good news is that emotional eating can be successfully addressed and managed. What we learn, we can unlearn. Many times, our intention in eating is to avoid experiencing uncomfortable emotions like stress and boredom. A scientific evidence-based approach to addressing emotional eating incorporates mindfulness and acceptance. Engaging in these strategies help us to realize that emotions can't hurt us. We can sit with the emotion. It doesn't have to overtake us.

Moreover, we can still focus

on what helps us to get closer to being healthy and active despite the experience of a negative emotion. We can develop psychological flexibility.

This is exemplified in the following statements: "I feel stressed, nevertheless I am going to stick with my healthy food plan for the day" or "I don't feel like exercising, nevertheless I am going to walk for 10 minutes. In the face of stress or reduced interest, I can still engage in behaviors that get me closer to my values or what's important to me. That is, despite the negative emotion, I make an incremental step toward being healthy and active as I age. This is because I want to participate in activities with friends or be around for family events like graduations or marriages, or not be a burden to my children."

When we utilize this type of psychological flexibility, we can learn the skills we need to meet our weight-management goals. The Villages Health Population Health team offers strategies to help you build a more flexible and effective response to negative and stress-inducing situations. Approaches to

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obtaining psychological flexibility include mindfulness for weight management and emotional eating, as well as other components such as managing food triggers and cues in the environment.

A 12-week program offered at The Villages Health may help you manage emotional eating. The program also includes strategies to deal with urges to eat and unhelpful self-sabotaging thoughts, as well as tried-and-true weight-management strategies. Before coming to The Villages Health, I worked at Lifespan Hospital Center for Weight and Wellness, leading groups in weight management and emotional eating. I also was a clinical associate professor at Brown University Medical School.

For more detailed information about the ACT on Healthy Living (Emotional Eating) Program, we have recorded an overview at <https://thevillageshealth.com/emotional-eating>

To register for the program, please call 352-604-5868

Lucy Rathier, Ph.D., is a Population Health specialist at The Villages Health.

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