

## The new way to lose weight – train your brain

If we all only ate when we were hungry, ate till we were full and chose healthy options then there wouldn't be an obesity problem worldwide. The fact is that it just isn't that simple to lose weight and keep it off. Morbid obesity is actually a psychological illness, rather than just a problem with food.

We humans have a primary driver for hunger which tells us to eat 3 times a day so we get the energy required for the body to stay alive and fuelled, but we also have a secondary mechanism that is active every 20 minutes, and if this is not controlled then the emotional control of eating takes over.

Thoughts and emotions can rewire the brain and create new circuits within the brain, therefore we can use these to influence food choices and eating behaviours. Naturally our brains seek pleasure, this causes a release of dopamine in the brain and means we feel good. The way to think about food changes is to focus on the good things that will happen, like you will have more energy, more self-confidence, be able to run with your children etc. Whatever you think about, it has to be more attractive than the junk food you are trying to avoid. Threats do not work, like telling a child not to touch something, all they hear is 'touch something', thinking 'I can't eat the donut' computes to the brain as 'eat the donut'.

In one study 600,000 people with heart disease were told to change diet and exercise habits otherwise they would die prematurely, every one of them changed for 3 weeks, but at 12 months follow only 10% of people had changed their habits. Most people thought it was not worth the effort to change and they would rather feel happy now than deprived and live longer. In a second study people were encouraged to look at the positive effects of changing their lifestyles, more energy, more confidence etc. In this study 77% of patients changed and maintained this change at 12 months. A marked difference from the previous study. This shows that giving people a vision of the joy of a new life works.

So let's look at how to re-circuit our brains.

- When you get a craving for food, think of something that gives you pleasure, or a time in your life when you were happy, or do something that gives you pleasure like go for a walk, cuddle your children or play music you like. This help to weaken the circuit of food cravings, and gives your brain the pleasure it wants from a different circuit.

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- Pause and feel the feeling of the craving, recognize it and identify what is going on in your body. This activates the frontal cortex and moves the craving to the higher centers of intelligence, weakening the circuit.
- Blind fold yourself and eat the food, slow down, eat it differently and notice the taste, the texture, the smell. Eat the food like it is a 5 star meal. This is more mindful eating and it changes the way you eat. Gorging on food is eating mindlessly, when you pay attention to what you are eating you self-regulate.
- You can train your brain to crave healthy foods, by eating a healthy snack whenever you are really hungry. This weakens the circuit between hunger and junk food and has been shown on brain scans to increase the positive response in the brain in relation to healthy food. The worst time to eat junk food is when you are really hungry as this increases the craving for it.
- Write down 50 reasons why you want to lose weight and eat healthier.

All these tips take minimal effort, have no cost and require no special foods. So give it a go, and let's break the bad circuits of craving and stop food running your life, be free from the cravings and let your body regulate itself 😊