

Wanting, But Not Food

When you're caught up in the heat of the moment and feel desperate to eat (not out of hunger), you may not realize that it's not food you crave. Food can be the answer to every question, the solution to every problem, the response to every impulse. You eat because you believe you can't have what you want that isn't food. Food is accessible, so it's not surprising that you reach for it automatically thinking it will meet your needs.

For example, say you want your spouse or partner to stop being critical of you, give you more attention, do more around the house, or that you even want him/her out of your life. Every time you connect to that desire, you may feel frightened, hopeless, overwhelmed, and conflicted. Rather than experience and deal with these authentic, uncomfortable feelings, your mind clicks on food. Maybe you're single and want a companion, but every time you consider seeking one, your heart goes weak at the thought of a dating service or rejection. You recall all your romantic disappointments and can't stand the thought of putting yourself out there again. Your heart wants love and, instead, you give it food. Or, perhaps you hate your job and want more of a challenge, a raise, a new boss, or to find work you are better suited for. Whenever you consider these longings, you get a knot in your stomach. You're not sure if there's a better job out there, you're afraid to speak up to your boss or ask for more money, or you don't know how to go about changing careers.

Nearly any want can get converted into food. The desperation in the drive to eat is often intense precisely because it's other things you're truly wanting. You're not desperate for cheese doodles or cheese cake. You're desperate for happiness, success, peace and quiet, space of your own, respect, excitement, meaningful work, companionship. When your emotional needs are met, you won't feel so passionate about food. However, until you let go of your attachment to food as the answer, you won't have the energy and motivation to take the risks to start journeying toward your goals.

Make a list of five things you really want. Don't rush the process. Write one today, one tomorrow, one a week from now. When you are satisfied with your list, make the items indelible in your mind. Then the next time you're in a frenzy and itching to eat or realize you're approaching binge mode, ask yourself if what you really want is one of those five things or food. My guess is that the force behind eating is about one (or all!) of those goals. So, in that moment, don't eat, but instead do something—one thing, anything—to reach your goals.

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