

Chocolate, Holidays, and Habits

Category: Eating

written by Olapeju Simoyan | December 28, 2021

Food is often a focus of the festivities and family gatherings that mark the holidays. But unfortunately, a season that should be a time of rest and joy can turn stressful, when food that's meant to be enjoyed becomes a source of anxiety and guilt.

Holiday behaviors for many people include overeating, followed by New Year's resolutions to eat less and exercise more. On the other hand, those with eating disorders may dread being confronted with so much food and having to explain why they are not "indulging" like everyone else.

My colleagues and I recently discussed the controversial subject of food addiction. While that condition isn't included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, many believe that foods can be addictive, particularly those that are highly processed or high in added sugars. There are programs that treat food addiction, such as Food Addicts Anonymous, and sugar addiction has been compared to nicotine addiction. I recently heard someone suggest that sugar should be a controlled substance.

I've been struggling with what to do with all the sugary items (including chocolates) that were among my Christmas presents this year—then I remembered that some of the people who gave me chocolates had also received chocolates from me!

But rather than focus on unhealthy extremes, we should think about balance. Healthy eating habits and a balanced diet are foundational to a sense of overall well-being. The problem is not food (or chocolate) itself—rather, it is our attitude that matters.

Personally, my attitude towards food has changed significantly. I once had an unhealthy attitude towards food. Overeating was bad, to my mind, but undereating not so much (if anything, I felt it was almost a badge of honor). Even though I didn't have an eating disorder, I did have unhealthy ideas about food and a distorted body image. I couldn't understand why people kept telling me I was so skinny, when I'd previously been told I wasn't as skinny as everyone else.

Now I know that it is what we do on a regular basis, including healthy eating and exercise, that has the greatest impact on our overall well-being. So if I eat chocolate in moderation while maintaining an overall healthy lifestyle, it's not the end of the world—even if I eat more chocolate than usual at Christmastime!

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