

## **Comfort Eating**

For some unknown reason food is either a woman's best friend or her worst enemy!

Of course this is a generalization.

My friend described her eating as follows:

She starts off with a healthy breakfast and feels on top of the world.

At 10 am when the tea trolley passes, she eyes the freshly baked goodies, but manages to resist and has an apple instead.

At noon her manager calls her to a meeting and she gets flack for a target not met.

Feeling like a failure, she eats her packed lunch, but instantly she feels the need for more.

She is drawn to the magnetic vending machine and, during the afternoon she polishes off two chocolate bars.

For my friend, comfort eating has been an endless struggle.

Comfort eating is when we use food to assuage feelings, cope with stress or even when we relax.

Comfort eating is a type of "emotional eating" that happens when we eat because of how we are feeling emotionally, rather than because of physical hunger. It could be as simple as overeating as a way of dealing with painful or difficult emotions or sometimes even out of boredom.

Responses to food can become pattern forming and sometimes stems from childhood years. Often the act of eating itself becomes important. Comfort eaters often don't even think about food that much or appreciate what they are eating.

Unfortunately this habit of eating is negative and in most cases will lead to weight gain, which then adds insult to the injury. Many suffer from comfort eating for years and years and it can be the main cause of a weight problem.

Our society's obsession with thinness does not help. If you are constantly dieting but suffer from comfort eating, you will feel a failure each time you touch the allegedly "forbidden" foods, which will probably be nothing but another trigger for overeating.

A recent survey of 2,000 people showed 47% of adolescents aged 16-24 and 40% of those aged 35-44 had eaten because they were bored. 25% of women and people aged 45-54 had eaten because they were stressed.

It is important to realise that comfort eating is about emotions and not about food.

Here are 3 action points, which should help:

- Identify the triggers of comfort eating
- It may be worthwhile to keep a food and mood diary
- Contact a counselling service. There are many available; it is best to talk to someone who will listen, support and advise you on how to cope with your feelings and with different events in your life.