HEALTHY HARMONY - Having a Healthy Relationship with Food

By Jackie Billhymer

Have you ever eaten a whole bag of chips while mindlessly watching TV? Do you find yourself opening the refrigerator or standing in the pantry late at night looking for a snack even though you are not hungry? Whether it’s out of habit, boredom, or it is something you don’t realize you are doing, it is likely that you have done things like this at some point in your life. Food can provide us with a quick and immediate sense of satisfaction. February 20-26 is National Eating Disorders Awareness Week and it gives us an opportunity to examine our relationship with food.

Food fuels our bodies and supplies the necessary minerals and nutrients to support growth and maintenance. Food can also tap into our emotions by providing a sense of comfort or control. Problems arise when we do not recognize that our behavior can also become the basis for an addictive cycle of poor eating habits. Eating disorders are serious and can be fatal, affecting people of all genders, ages, racial or ethnic backgrounds, and body types. You can learn more about eating disorders and the risks associated with them from the National Institute of Mental Health’s “Eating Disorders: About More Than Food” online brochure.
If you want to have a healthier relationship with food, the National Eating Disorders Association published a blog by Sondra Kronberg where she outlines four approaches to building healthier food habits.

- **Relaxed eating** is about listening and responding to the signals your body gives. If you are hungry, eat to the point of being satisfied, but not full. It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to signal that you are full. If you eat slowly and chew your food well, it aids digestion and allows your body to signal a sense of fullness.

- “**Preference Over Position**” (© Kronberg, Sondra) is the idea that you make choices constantly throughout the day with a certain level of flexibility. If you get dressed and find a large stain or hole in your shirt, you change your shirt. Your food preferences should also be flexible. If you prefer crunchy snacks and limit yourself to a bag of chips as your only choice, your preference has turned into a position, and you may not choose other, more healthy alternatives.

- **Balance** means eating a variety of foods from all food groups. Dietary Guidelines for Americans has a terrific resource for what you can do to build a healthy eating routine.

- **Flexibility** is crucial for a healthy relationship with food. Eating a donut for breakfast does not mean the whole day is lost and that your only choices the rest of the day are similarly unhealthy foods. Be mindful of the choices you have for the remaining meals and do not get discouraged by one unhealthy meal.

If you or someone you know is struggling with food addiction and/or an eating disorder, it is important to get help and talk to a health care provider.

References:

- National Institute of Mental Health
- National Eating Disorders Association
- Build a Healthy Eating Routine Guidelines