



Rethink how you eat

It's the 1980s, I'm living in London and self-employed, running seminars on how to stop smoking. The seminars go well, but I'm increasingly aware that most of my clients, especially the women, are very worried about gaining weight.

The problem is I'm not exactly skinny, if you know what I mean, so I'm concerned that I'm not representing my work as well as I could. No matter what I say to my clients, my *size* says it all: "Stop smoking and gain a couple of dress sizes". Some clients even told me that if they did gain weight, they would return to smoking. These women had used cigarettes to control their weight. What they now needed to learn was how to control their weight without smoking.

But first of all, of course, I needed to learn that myself. I knew exactly where my challenge was. Like

Want to break bad eating habits and set up good ones? Writer, expert and reformed overeater GILLIAN RILEY reveals how she overcame emotional eating; and offers advice to the IMAGE team.

countless others, after dinner, I spent my evenings eating stuff I didn't really need. Typically, I would feel stressed from the day and frustrated with my work, especially the publicity, which I've never done well. If there was something else going on as well – a disappointment, a misunderstanding with a friend, some mistake I had made – then it was all the worse. (For me, emotional eating always involves overeating. Some people stop eating when stressed, for example, but that is a different process. Emotional eating implies eating in response to emotions, to cope with or avoid them.)

I always had snack food in the house. There would be some potato chips and dip. I made endless variations of toast: topped with melted Stilton, pâté, butter and honey or jam. Often ice-cream or chocolates. Savoury or sweet, the consistent ingredient was processed carbohydrate: grains, potatoes and sugar.

Whether reading, on the phone with a friend or watching TV, these snacks were the process of winding down for me, the way to finish my day, to provide a reward for things I'd accomplished or to console me for things I hadn't. I would be sprawled on my sofa with the edibles on a side table or – even better – right next to me on the sofa.

I justified this eating by picking the “healthy” brands, preferring, for example, the “hand cut” or “low fat” potato chips. I reasoned that I'd already eaten healthy vegetables during the day, and this snacking was nothing more than innocent fun. But it was keeping me two or three dress sizes above a healthy weight and – try as I might – I wasn't able to avoid that unwelcome truth.

My resistance was so strong it took me years before I really got down to doing something about my eating habits. I lived with a constant, nagging conversation in the back of my head, wishing I wasn't overeating but not doing very much about it. The turning point was around 1995, when my publisher asked me to follow up my bestselling book on how to stop smoking with a book about overeating. Oh dear, I thought, remembering the nagging conversation and my reluctance to change. I ignored her first request, her second and her third. Then I started writing.

The one thing I was sure of was how to go about cutting out my evening eating. I would incorporate the same theories and techniques I had used to stop smoking myself and had been teaching to smokers for the past 15 years. I was clear that whether mild or severe, overeating was best explained as an addiction,

and that meant addressing the core issue of addictive desire.

What I knew back then was that a desire to smoke is triggered by what are known as “conditioned associations”. This is what makes it challenging to stay off the cigarettes long term, because even a month or more after quitting, ex-smokers encounter a conditioned association, which is a circumstance where they would have smoked in the past. Suddenly, out of the blue, they want to smoke; this takes command of their brain and, if a cigarette is accessible, the deed is done.

Smokers will often be advised to avoid these associations. For example, if you usually light a cigarette after a meal, you get up immediately, do the dishes and think about something else. What I taught smokers is that it works much better to pay mindful attention to the desire to smoke instead of trying to ignore it. This makes the desire and associated withdrawal symptoms fade much faster, and there's a much lower chance of relapse. So this was my starting point.

Realising I needed more information, I began to visit the British Library to dig

The IMAGE DIARIES

Liz Dwyer
IMAGE beauty editor

Saturday

Am going on holidays in seven days so determined to have a healthy weekend with lots of juicing, soups and little/no alcohol. I'm hosting a busy fashion/beauty workshop all day so start with two boiled eggs for their “feeling full factor” as it's hard to take a break during classes. Make it to about 1pm before caving in, and scoff a Cadbury Creme Egg, which keeps me going until I get home at 4pm, when I grab a huge chunk of cheese before heading out for a long walk. Later, I make a big pot of creamy celeriac soup and dig in, feeling satisfied with the day's work. The sister calls in for a bottle of wine and before I know it I'm nibbling away at her Chinese take-away and we end up out clubbing and doing shots of Baby Guinness [Tia Maria and Baileys] and drinking cider like it's going out of fashion. Arrive home at 4am and feast on cheese and crackers as they are the only non-fruit or vegetable option in my fridge.

Sunday

Hangover from hell. Start with a diet chocolate mousse at around 9am as sugar levels are at an all-time low – would much rather a few slices of thick toast and butter but I avoid buying bread for this very reason. Out to brunch with friends, so tuck into delicious chicken quesadillas and a big slab of Rocky Road for dessert. Tut-tut! Feel shattered and tired all afternoon and still want more food, but only carbs will do, so whip up a bacon pasta and tomato dish for dinner, too tired to feel guilty about all the crap I've ingested today.

Monday

Resolve to compensate for bad weekend and I'm off to a good start with natural yoghurt and seeds for breakfast. Make it to lunchtime without snacking, not because of will power but because I'm stuck in a meeting all morning. A Marks & Spencer chicken noodle soup is on the menu but I'm not satisfied and have half a caramel slice afterwards. Dinner is a bowl of Thai chicken soup but the munchies kick in around 10pm and a bowl of Crunchy Nut Cornflakes comes to the rescue. Go to bed feeling hungry, but semi-virtuous.

Tuesday

Himself makes me a power juice of spinach leaves, carrots, pineapple, apples and ginger before going to work. I'd love this every morning but it takes forever to make and even longer to clean up after, so I only have it on the rare mornings we abandon the snooze button. Snack on a piece of cheese and a few slices of chicken breast at about 11.30am and then have a Marks & Spencer Simply Fuller Longer Spaghetti Bolognese for lunch. Not feeling full at all and eat two mini Kit Kats immediately after. Have endless cups of tea all afternoon, work is very frustrating as we have the Beauty Awards on this week and lots of admin to deal with. Supposed to be going to Pilates class later, so another soup on the menu for dinner – yawn!

GILLIAN SAYS “Liz, you are quite a rebel, and I suspect you feel that you're not allowed to behave like this, and that you have to change your ways. You even say, ‘tut-tut!’ and that on one day you're ‘too tired to feel guilty’, suggesting that guilt is normally present. You seem a bit of an all-or-nothing sort of person, as you're considering power juicing on the one hand and empty carbohydrates on the other. Many possibilities lie between these extremes, and your sense of free choice and control could come from discovering what they are.”

TAKE CONTROL

- Establish a genuine sense of choice**
 If you deny yourself freedom of choice by making rules and prohibitions, you are likely to feel more intense and persistent cravings, greater negativity such as anger and sadness, more stressed, and obsessed with food. All of which eventually leads to rebellious overeating.
- Manage your addictive desire to eat**
 If all you do is throw out the rules, you're likely to overeat. What makes the difference and gives you real, lasting control is developing the skill of "working through" your addictive desire. This involves spotting it in the first place (not always easy to do) and thinking it through by remembering that it's your free choice and what's at stake.
- Discover motivation not connected with weight loss**
 For many reasons, weight loss alone is poor motivation. It's much better to recall more immediate benefits, such as less stress, increased energy, not feeling bloated after meals or feeling proud of yourself.
- Emotional states trigger addictive desire**
 But it will help you to see them as two different things. You might feel angry because you've had a fight with your partner or bored with life because you don't have one. Either way, overeating doesn't change any of that; all it does is satisfy your addictive desire and reinforce the conditioned association between that emotional state and addictive overeating. (Remember, your addictive desire to eat isn't necessarily associated with any emotion at all.)
- Be compassionate and patient with yourself**
 It's impossible to catch every single desire for addictive food. So be kind to yourself when you don't manage it, while holding onto your intention to become more aware, so that you don't simply resign yourself to failure.
- Be imperfect**
 Aim to overeat less rather than not at all, which is impossible to maintain. Many people make rigid rules, only to go wildly out of control when they've taken even one forbidden bite.
- Discuss this as little as possible**
 Decline offers of food with as little fuss or explanation as you can, and you might find that people aren't as put out as you imagine. If pressed, try: "Can I save it for later?" or "Can I have half that slice?" If you are consistent in any particular situation, you train the people in your life to expect that you won't be eating those items and it becomes normal.

out research, focussing on addiction and obesity in particular. One of the most exciting pieces of research I found was the confirmation that addictive behaviours

- including overeating - make

use of the same pathways

in the brain. A burst

of dopamine will be

interpreted by a smoker

as a desire to smoke

and by an overeater as

a desire to eat; which

is why cigarettes and

food are interchangeable

for so many people. I also

found plenty of research

demonstrating that this addictive

desire diminishes if managed correctly.

I now understand how the brain works in

connection with the correct management.

Addictive desire arises from the mid-brain

limbic system; its management can only

be handled in the pre-frontal cortex, right behind the forehead. The concepts I teach get these two areas to communicate. The brain is so plastic, it only takes days to make structural changes.

So there I was on my

sofa, with my stress,

exhaustion and whatever

self-critical, negative

emotions I happened

to be experiencing that

day. I had been teaching

people how to experience

addictive desire and talk

themselves through that

by developing a strong sense

of choice (see panel, left). Now it

was my turn.

I remember my strongest feeling of

unsatisfied desire, which felt as if waves

were moving up and down my whole body.

It wasn't pleasant, but it was a fairly brief,

READ ON

Gillian runs seminars in London (£280 for a two-day seminar); she recommends *Eating Less: Take Control of Overeating* (Vermilion, £7.99) before attending; she also offers one-to-one telephone and/or email counselling at £40 an hour; for more information, www.eatingless.com.

The IMAGE DIARIES

Kate O'Dowd

IMAGE assistant editor

Monday

The stress kicks in early today. I don't get around to breakfast (organic peanut butter on spelt toast and tea) until 11.30am, by which time I'm pretty cranky. The first slice is virtually inhaled, while the second is forgotten about at my desk. There isn't time to go out for lunch supplies (or even think about what I might like), so I pick at a tin of tuna that I scavenge from the back of the office kitchen cupboard, with a slice of the bread I have in for breakfast. The pears I have for snacking do not tempt. By the time I get home from work (after 8pm), I'm frazzled and have a nervous knot in my stomach about what I have to do the next day, so only pick at the dinner my boyfriend has made. I have a mug of hot chocolate (under his instruction) and go to bed with the panicky feeling that I won't sleep. And don't.

Thursday

I've had a good day at work and I'm feeling jubilant. My boyfriend is out for the evening, my apartment is spotless and I feel like treating myself. So I pick up my favourite takeaway pizza (Milano's Padana - it's goat's cheese, caramelised red onions, spinach and garlic oily deliciousness), a bottle of red wine, and

a large bar of Green & Black's. Most of the above are devoured (save for a glass of the wine and a few lonely squares of the chocolate) while curled up on the sofa, watching multiple episodes of *Downton Abbey*. Happiness.

Sunday

It's a lazy Sunday morning, with only a touch of hangover from dinner with friends the night before - so one to be enjoyed, rather than spent sipping 7UP in a darkened room. At 11am, my boyfriend and I pop down to the place on the corner for brunch. I have Eggs Benedict and an orange juice. Healthyish, I think - better than the Full Irish Himself goes for, anyway. After that, we go for a cycle and pass our favourite bakery, so stop to read the papers - I have a latte and two madeines, while he has an espresso (we are now even on the "pig out" front). Next stop is the farmers' market, where we pick up the makings of a lamb casserole, a bottle of red and an old-fashioned sticky gingerbread - that is our evening, and it's a good one.

GILLIAN SAYS "A great many people go around thinking that they shouldn't be eating like this, but not getting any more specific than that. So, Kate, I encourage you to consider the downside to your style of eating, especially how it affects your health and wellbeing, rather than your weight. This is your motivation to make changes, which isn't the only thing you need, but is your essential starting point. Consider the effect of food on your stress levels and thus your sleeping, and know that sugar and grains release cortisol in your body."

The IMAGE DIARIES

Melanie Morris
IMAGE editor

Tuesday

I start the day on a low – only three hours' sleep last night due to a chronic phase of insomnia. I grab a banana on my way out the door to work and wolf it down. Meeting after meeting gets me so stressed, and so anxious, I end up with a knot in my tummy. There's no way I can eat (this rarely happens). I have nothing all day until 6pm, en route to the gym when I buy a Nakd bar to give me some zip for the workout. I buy a few more to stash in my bag for emergencies as I believe this is what "sensible" people do. In the gym, I've no energy and hate my workout, although I forget about work and temporarily de-stress. Home by 8.30pm, and the day's stresses have returned. I rant at my fiancé whilst devouring two small bowls of (dry) muesli, shovelling it in with a teaspoon as I "emote". He then insists I have "a proper dinner" so I have Marks & Spencer's stuffed peppers at about 9.30pm (nice, but bland), two mandarins and some mixed nuts and raisins. I know, I know ... I'm eating all my calories at night, and that's bad.

Wednesday

Terribly busy day full of stupid food choices. Banana for breakfast at 7.30am before spending all day judging the IMAGE Beauty Awards at The Dylan Hotel. I don't eat anything all day, even though a delicious, healthy "soup and sandwich" lunch is laid on – I'm too busy chatting. Instead, over the day, I graze on two home-baked, choc-dipped pieces of

shortbread and a mini Danish (which I don't actually want), I have the Nakd bars in my bag, which I forget about, and drink too much coffee – I'm wired. From The Dylan, it's a big sugar/caffeine slump as I head in to a fashion show, so no food until I get home to lamb, broad bean and chorizo stew (yum), two mandarins and a handful of nuts and raisins at 9pm. Far too late again, I know, and with the stress of the day, I'm not even that hungry.

Thursday

A busy, but no-stress day ... Have my usual dawn banana, then off for a 9am meeting in Residence. My colleagues are having breakfast, but I stick to coffee. I'm not hungry, but I've been dying for a bagel with peanut butter from Itsa for two days. I reward myself with the pumpernickel one, toasted, at about 2pm, and all is well with the world. As I'm going to the gym later, I know I'll need the calories and I'll work off those carbs. Dinner, late again (yes, but at least I had lunch today) is a two-egg and two-egg-white frittata with feta, onions, green olives, plus an apple and a mandarin. The Nakd bars remain untouched in my bag.

GILLIAN SAYS "It's often tricky to identify addictive eating, which can show up in the frequency and quantity, but also in the quality of food eaten. In particular, I'm struck by your decision to pass on a healthy lunch, only to graze on shortbread and a Danish instead. You explain this as being 'too busy chatting', but this is a classic example of being controlled by food addiction, and I suspect that if it wasn't chatting, it would be something else. The next day, for example, you pass on breakfast, which could have been healthy, and later go for a bagel. Hunger signals, by the way, are unreliable."

one-off experience of withdrawal, and after that my addictive desire to eat was tamed and acceptable. Very soon, it became non-existent, in that I would, at times, feel the same negativity on the sofa at the end of the day, but I didn't particularly want to eat anything. It's still like that today.

Through that process I discovered two things. One was that my emotional state didn't get any worse when I didn't snack through the evening. In fact, I felt better, and I've since found research that validates this. One review of 80 separate studies found that, although most people feel better while they are eating something, they feel worse afterwards. Carbohydrate consumption, in particular, was found to be more likely to prolong a depressed mood than alleviate it. The same applies to symptoms of stress.

The other thing I discovered was how good I felt when I stopped overeating, which came as a surprise because I had no idea how it had been affecting me. I felt brighter and more energised in the mornings. I felt a huge sense of accomplishment. Bouts of acid indigestion disappeared. I had more energy during the day and felt less stressed in general. And, of course, that nagging conversation in my head simply evaporated.

All this appeared long before I lost any weight, although that did follow. Being in my sixties, I'm susceptible to middle-age spread and pleased to be a size 12, down from the size 18 I was 20 years ago. Even more important is that I'm as healthy as I can be.

My initial resistance to cutting out evening snacking was largely because I was seeing this entirely in terms of weight, but I've found that health and self-esteem are more effective motivators than weight loss. Many women, of course, attach their self-esteem to their size, but a far more empowering source of self-esteem is to be found in their relationship with food. There have been times when my self-esteem seemed non-existent, when it looked like I'd made a total mess of everything in my life and all I could really say was, "Well, at least I'm not overeating." And that was something. ■

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